



meditations

for the time of retreat

St. John Baptist de La Salle

Translated by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC
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The frontispiece is from an engraving by J.B. Scotin of a lost painting by P. Leger. The engraving was first printed in *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, by Canon Blain, opposite the title page of the first book, page 117, first published in Rouen, France, 1733.

Reprinted in 2025
by the Christian Brothers Conference

Lasallian Resource Center

Cover photograph by Anthony Calabrese
Cover design by Brother Roderick Robertson, FSC

ISBN: 9798281699713

Printed by St. Mary's College Press, Winona, Minnesota

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MEDITATIONS
for the time
of
RETREAT

For the use of all persons who are engaged in the education of youth, and particularly for the retreat which the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during vacation.

by

John-Baptist de La Salle,

Doctor of Theology, Founder of the
Brothers of the Christian Schools.

First published in Rouen, France ca 1730
(Original title page, last line adapted)



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Introduction

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* by St. John Baptist de La Salle were first translated into English for the Brothers many years ago. Unfortunately, however, the only translation until 1953 was based on a French edition published by Brother Philip in 1853; this edition undertook to modify several passages of the original text of St. de La Salle. The English translation was published in 1882. It was not until more than three hundred years after the birth of the saint, that is, in 1953, that an English translation based on the original text became available to the Brothers. This was the work of Brother Clair Stanislaus Battersby.

The text of Brother Clair has been of incalculable service to the English-speaking Brothers. It has provided them with a faithful and exact translation of the first edition of the meditations without omissions or changes. However, it is presently out of print and there are significant reasons to justify a new translation at this time. Brother Clair himself recognized a certain limitation in his own translation:

One slight difficulty has been experienced in the effort to maintain complete accuracy, in the matter of quotations from holy Scripture inserted in the text. De La Salle quotes frequently, but rarely if ever gives any references. He usually cites from memory and incorporates a text into the very fabric of his own composition in such a way as to make it often indistinguishable from his own words. The method followed here has been to disengage the scriptural quotation from the context in which it is embedded, and to quote it accurately. This occasionally necessitates the

recasting of a whole sentence (Introduction, pp. 20-21).

A further reason for a new translation is found in the considerable body of scientific study of these meditations which has been carried out during the past twenty years. This includes a publication of the original text itself in the collection *Cahiers lasalliens* (vol. 13) under the direction of Brother Maurice Auguste Hermans, a concordance of the vocabulary of the meditations (*Lasallianum*, vol. 4), and several studies by Brother Michel Sauvage, notably on the use of the New Testament in the meditations (*Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 1) and the significance of these meditations for an understanding of the role of the teaching Brother in the service of the church (*Catéchèse et Laicat*, Paris, Liget, 1962).

It is in the light of these recent studies that I present this new translation. An attempt will be made to do three things in this Introduction: to give a brief description of the text; to show the place of this text in the "story" of the man, de La Salle, in order to see the full meaning of the text in terms of his life and the role that Scripture played in it; and, finally, to explain how these meditations in all their richness, and in their limitations as well, can be very valuable to the Brothers today.

(1)

Description of the Text

History of the text

Among all the writings of St. de La Salle, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* has had an unhappy history. His other works have enjoyed from the beginning a much greater popularity. Those dealing with the professional functions of the Brothers were the most frequently published: *Les*

Règles de la Bienséance, La Conduite des Ecoles, Devoirs d'un Chrétien, Instructions et Prières. Similarly those dealing with the ascetical principles of the Brother's life had many editions: *La Règle, L'Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison,* and the *Recueil.* All of these writings undoubtedly made a profound impression on the minds of the Brothers. However, it must be recognized that very often a fundamentalist understanding predominated in the interpretation and the reading of these publications, though there is no question that such an approach did not prevent a real element of creativity in the history of the Institute, clearly demonstrated in the well known variety of educational work developed by the Brothers. This creativity, it must be admitted, was occasionally impeded by a fidelity to the letter of the text with its limited perspectives. There was also a focus on the "practical" and the "more observable" elements of the writings, and an emphasis on "precise" compliance which often resulted in a loss of relevance to contemporary needs.

On the other hand, the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts,* even though they were used almost daily and frequently cited in the official circulars of the Institute, suffered from the routine or superficial method in which they were employed, or they served very often to illustrate the spiritual thought of the present moment. The fate of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* was even worse. Though they were reedited several times and though their reading was prescribed by the *Common Rules* during the annual retreat, they somehow remained in the dark for most Brothers. It is a fact that there is no reference to these meditations in any General Chapter from 1717 to 1901, that is, from the Chapter just before the death of the Founder up to and including the one held in 1901. Similarly, except for one volume of circulars during the generalate of Brother Joseph (1884-1897), any reference to these meditations in the official circulars of the Institute is extremely rare. Somehow, despite the great attachment of the Brothers to all the writings of St. de La Salle, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* have been hardly known.

Rediscovery of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*:

Several recent publications have led to a change of attitude regarding Lasallian studies. First there was the doctoral dissertation of Brother Michel Sauvage (*Catéchèse et Laicat*), to which reference has already been made. Without overlooking the other writings of St. de La Salle, this dissertation focused on the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* as central to Lasallian thought. Brother Michel's very systematic study of the New Testament citations in these meditations furthered a rediscovery of the depth of meaning in this work of the Founder. Another very thorough study must be mentioned, that of Brother Luis Varela, which also throws considerable new light on the role of Scripture in Lasallian spirituality (*Biblia y Espiritualidad en San J. B. de La Salle*, Sinite, 10, Salamanca, 1966).

It was through such studies that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* were rediscovered. The General Chapter of 1966-67 made several references to them, but more significantly these references, especially in the *Declaration on the Brother in the World Today*, inspired the general determination of the Chapter to have the Brothers of today understand and live the charism of St. de La Salle. This understanding of the Chapter and of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* has been the focus of my own doctoral dissertation, "L'itinéraire Evangélique de Saint J. B. de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans ses Méditations pour les Temps de la Retraite (*Cahiers lasalliens*, vols. 45, 46, 1974).

In brief, the rediscovery of these meditations coincides with the effort to rediscover the original spirit of the Founder, which was the task attempted by the Chapter in response to the call of Vatican Council II for the renewal of the religious life. It was the Council that declared that true renewal must be a return to "the original sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community . . . under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 2). This "spiritual" renewal, then, is primarily a renewal in and by the action of the Holy Spirit, a renewed

awareness on our part of the “gifts” of the Spirit, or a “charismatic” renewal. It is also a renewed awareness of the gospel sources of this charismatic gift of St. de La Salle, the charism of the Holy Spirit given to him not just for himself personally but for the needs of the Brothers and through them for the needs of the world and of the church.

Fidelity to this charism, then, is not carried out by some kind of fidelity to the past nor to a collection of citations from the writings of the Founder. It is rather the fidelity of a community of living men seeking to hear the call of the Holy Spirit in the needs of the world and of the church in their own times, seeking to discern the gifts of the Spirit, to use these gifts to give witness in turn to the good news of the kingdom of God in today’s world.

It is this historical and relational understanding of fidelity, fidelity to the Spirit today in a community, a community which sees itself united to the first pouring forth of the Spirit in St. de La Salle and the original Brothers, that I have attempted to explain in my study of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

A constant tradition in the Institute and a critical analysis of internal evidence leave no doubt about the authenticity of the authorship and content of these meditations. The precise date of composition has not been definitively established, but the study of Brother Michel Sauvage shows that St. de La Salle made use of a translation of the New Testament which was not available prior to 1707. There is also evidence that these meditations were composed towards the end of his life. They are the work of a mature person speaking of what he has lived through, “after long experience,” as expressly stated in the Foreword of the first edition.

The literary sources of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* have not been systematically studied. It is nonetheless certain that St. de La Salle was influenced by the concerns, the ideas, and the experience of persons of his time who were engaged in the reform of schools, and especially by those who were involved in the training of teachers.

Rigault has affirmed this in his *Histoire Générale de l'Institut*. After presenting a summary of the meditations, he adds:

Such is, in summary, this book which in several passages clearly reflects the teachings of the *Escole Paroissiale*, the *Remonstrances* of Charles Demia, the *Avis* of Nicholas Roland, and the *Maximes* of Father Barré. But these teachings are broadened by all the profound and powerful dimensions of the doctrine of the Apostle Paul (vol.1, p. 498).

Despite the evidence of these literary influences, the actual amount of scriptural citations in the meditations, as well as the altogether personal way in which the Scripture is cited, encourage us to affirm with Rayez:

The most original part of his teaching is his grasp on St. Paul. Beyond all other sources that can be found, it is unquestionable that the principal source of the thought of the Founder of the Christian Schools is St. Paul ("Etudes lasalliennes," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, no. 109, 1952).

It is beyond dispute that Scripture is the principal source of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and especially the writings of St. Paul. The citations of St. Paul are, in fact, so literal that we must presume that the "Founder worked with a New Testament constantly at hand and actually copied out certain passages directly" (Brother Michel Sauvage, *Cahiers lasallien*, vol. 1, pp. 36-37).

A recent study by Brother Yves Poutet throws additional light on the question of the sources of these meditations. Among the publications during the time of the Founder there was one which has often been proposed as a possible source because of its structure and its content. This is the *Meditations* of Father Giry, written for the Sisters of the Charitable Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus, especially for the time of their retreat, published in 1696 in Paris. The influence of this book on the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is clear, but the citations from St. Paul in the work of Giry

have a meaning which is entirely different from what is characteristic of St. de La Salle's use of St. Paul.

There are sixteen meditations altogether in the work by St. de La Salle, two for each day of the annual retreat. In summary they present a synthesis of thought, and their style is conditioned by a language that is often rigorous in its simplicity. There is nothing of the pious homily in these meditations. In fact, their plain and direct manner has led Brother Michel Sauvage to state:

Their language is even austere, their style without any effort at grace. Yet in studying them it becomes clear that they present a very coherent doctrine, well thought out over a long period of time, each word carefully chosen to carry its full weight, so that analysis is difficult and synthesis practically impossible (*Catéchèse et Laicat*, pp. 558-9).

Rather than propose a theory on the purpose of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, my own study of the scriptural citations in them leads me to conclude that the occasionally abrupt style is less a result of any unfinished quality in the work and more the result of the profound character of the language in which St. de La Salle is seeking to express the very substance of the life he has led over a long period of time.

It could be said that the saint has finally come to understand, perhaps fully and all at once, the direction that God has given to his life, a God who goes before him, calls him, urges him on. Since the meditations form a work which is tightly structured, it would be a mistake to read it as an "historical treatise" or as a "theological synthesis." It is simply a collection of "meditations" and it is "for the time of retreat."

"The annual retreat" is a special time of the year when the Brothers consider their life in its entirety in order to get a better grasp on its meaning and its orientation before God. At this special time the focus in the mind of St. de La Salle is the *work* of the Brothers, that is, everything that makes up the very substance of their day-to-day existence. His

purpose is not to provide some examination of conscience on their duties as teachers but rather to discover their spiritual, their “charismatic” identity in the very roots of their calling, which is the ultimate purpose of their lives.

They are “meditations”; that is, they were not written to give “reasons” to convince the Brothers of the importance of their ministry, nor to regain awareness of the “truths” of revelation, but rather to provide Brothers with a stimulus to prayer. From this point of view the meditations are inseparable from the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. The main “character” of the meditations is God, the living God Who calls, Who chooses, Who sends on mission; it is the God of mystery, Whose saving love for everyone has been realized in Jesus Christ, and is revealed visibly in the church by an ecclesial ministry, through men who are sent as “angels” with a special charismatic gift. This gift is put to work in humble actions that must wait in patience for their full achievement. St. de La Salle constantly appeals to the Brothers; he continually addresses them in the second personal pronoun: “you.” This appeal is aimed at a dialogue, not with himself, but with the living God.

The dialogue is not summoned forth with reasons, with truths, nor even with emotions. St. de La Salle knew very well that the kind of emotions needed in this regard are not evoked from outside a person. Rather, what he seems to evoke in these meditations is the movement of the Spirit of God Himself, who speaks in the depth of the heart when a Brother, guided by the light of Scripture, recognizes the living action of the mystery of God within him. When this happens, a Brother reflects that the “story” of his own life has meaning only in relation to the one great plan of God’s saving action for all men.

Content of the Meditations

St. de La Salle wrote his meditations after long experience towards the end of his life. Very often, however, they have been read in the past within a framework that separates the experience of life from the word of Scripture. This manner of approach to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* prevents any possibility of reading them in the manner in which St. de La Salle read the "story" of his own life as he progressively established the Society of the Brothers in the light of Scriptures. For him there was an inseparable unity of dialogue between Scripture and the events of life.

Unfortunately the framework for reading the meditations which was suggested by the original Foreword of the first edition (probably written by Canon Blain) is the one which does not seem true to St. de La Salle himself. He is referred to as using the authority of St. Paul to "establish" and "prove" a "doctrine" of the ministry of the Brother. Further, this doctrine was supposed to be deduced from the facts of "experience," from the "lights received from God," and from "tradition." In this way Scripture would be reduced to the category of "proofs" and St. de La Salle would be offering us a "doctrine," a synthesis built up from experience and based in prayer on the authority of Scripture and tradition. This framework for reading the meditations reduces the content to "doctrinal" propositions, to "truths of revelation." The annual retreat, then, becomes the time to renew awareness of these truths.

Recent studies, however, show us another framework for reading the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. A Brother hears in the meditations an echo of the lived reality of his own life. Scripture becomes more meaningful and profound than a simple "proof" or "authority on which he is based." In the pages that follow I hope to show in four parts this framework for reading which moves from life to Scripture, from Scripture to life. I propose to show that the meditations are: (1) inseparable from the way of life chosen by St. de

La Salle under the influence of the gospel, his “story”; (2) an appeal to the Brothers to express the “story” of their own lives, their own “word”; (3) a celebration of a mystery; and (4) the role of Scripture in the light of which St. de La Salle discerned and enlightened the way of life of the Brothers, their “story,” in a radical relation to the work of God visibly in action in history.

The “story” of the life of St. de La Salle

We cannot really appreciate the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* unless we have an understanding of the interplay of the gospel and the events of the life of St. de La Salle, the full human and Christian dimensions of the course he chose to follow, the direction and quality he gave to his life, and his “story” in the light of his relationship with God. It is only when we see the language of the meditations, despite its limitations, in the context of the life he had lived that we can begin to appreciate the rich meaning it had for him and which he intended to convey to the Brothers.

Immediately following the death of St. de La Salle, the Brothers began to collect the memoirs, the writings, and everything else that could be used in preparing a biography of their Founder.

The life of St. de La Salle is known to us through the work of his first three biographers: Brother Bernard, Maillefer, the nephew of the saint, and Blain, ecclesiastical superior of the Brothers during the absence of the Founder in the South of France (1712-14). The biography of Brother Bernard was unknown to most of the Brothers until 1965 when it was first published (*Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 4). The same is true for the two manuscripts of Maillefer written in 1723 and 1740, published in France in 1966 (*Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 6), though an English edition of the 1740 manuscript appeared in 1963 (St. Mary’s College Press, translation by Brother Didymus John). The biography of Blain had more success. It first appeared in 1733. Unfortunately its style is verbose, excessively diffuse, and long-winded. But

it contains an immense amount of information on the origins and first years of the Institute and on the conflicts the Founder had to endure in the consolidation and extension of the Institute. Furthermore, it is impossible to find all this information anywhere else.

One fact about all three of these biographers is their intention to write the life of a saint. As a result, what they wrote was dependent on certain a priori judgments. The facts were viewed and interpreted in accord with the religiosity of their times and the particular slant of each biographer's personal spirituality. Their reading of the facts was no doubt valid and in fact valuable, but we must approach their reading with certain reservations. The biographies they wrote, especially Blain's, follow a genre of hagiography which has its own canons, whose purpose is not always easy to detect. Without minimizing the importance of Blain's work, Rayez remarks:

When the biographers do not rely on documentations and do not refer clearly to authentic sources, the chapters that deal exclusively with the virtues and the spirit of their subjects run the risk of becoming commonplace lectures; or just the reverse, if the author himself happens to be a person of spiritual substance, the chapter will become a veritable treatise of real worth. These oratorical embellishments, whether spurious or authentic spirituality, are unrelated to unquestionable documents or facts and therefore cannot be attributed to the venerable persons whose deeds are being described. Are we not running the risk occasionally—Rigault fears it more than once—of taking the thought and considerations of Blain as if they were those of John Baptist de La Salle? ("Etudes lasalliennes," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, no. 109, 1952, pp. 35-36).

There have been many biographies of the Founder since Blain. However, these have most often followed the

thought and the considerations of Blain, so that Rayez remarks:

. . . the chapters in which the biographers have tried to describe the character of the Founder of the schools, ordinarily rely exclusively on the texts, the traits, and the judgments of the fourth book of Blain, "The Spirit, the Sentiments, and the Virtues of M. De La Salle" (*Etudes lasalliennes*," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, no. 109, 1952, p. 34).

There have been valuable studies on St. de La Salle published in the English language. They have shown clearly the Lasallian contributions in the field of education and also in spirituality. It is nonetheless true that in the treatment of the life of the Founder these studies manifest a rather complete dependence on Blain, or on other biographies that have themselves depended on Blain.

It must, then, be admitted that the interpretation of the life of St. de La Salle as presented by Canon Blain has created an image which has profoundly influenced generations of Brothers. This image and this glorification of virtues and examples have unfortunately hindered us from a real encounter with the man himself in the surroundings of his life, in his day-to-day relationships with other men, in their response together to the calls of God, in the full dimension of the events of their lives.

It has been my aim to go beyond this oversimplified reading of the historical event which is our Founder's life. I have tried to enter into his "itinerary" (the facts of his life) through the light of certain autobiographical documents, and I have tried to grasp in his own language how he himself understood these facts (cf. *Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 45, pp. 77-89). I have tried to have St. de La Salle speak for himself, tell us his own "story." The validity of this approach rests on the fact that we take on the very viewpoint of St. de La Salle himself, we keep the full dimension of the events of his life, all of which are now much better known because of the publication of documents and studies related to the milieu

and the institutions in which St. de La Salle lived. We thus choose to use his own "language" rather than that of his biographers or of their interpretation of what he says. Furthermore, we can demonstrate how his language develops through successive commitments and gives a meaning and a direction to his whole "itinerary" with the Brothers.

This method, finally, helps us enter into his "itinerary" by showing the gospel "constants" that are present there. These constants are not "virtues" chosen a priori, either from a theology of the religious life, from his original biographers, or from our own. By eliminating the apologetic slant of the biographers, we can not only understand the influence of the gospel on his life in a more critical fashion, verifying its actual implications and limits, but we can also and especially grasp the full human dimension of a religious language in its own matrix: the lived reality of his life. His word and his action are then placed in his own personal "itinerary," in the mystery of his own person, the true "story" of his life. His personal life is still a mystery, as all persons ultimately remain, but still it reveals certain verifiable unchanging elements.

A complete history of St. de La Salle, written in accord with this method, would be of monumental proportions. I have restricted myself, therefore, to four events in his life selected because they are at the heart of the process whereby St. de La Salle made his critical decision in favor of the teachers and the Institute of the Christian Schools. In these four key events, events which are decisively revelatory of the person de La Salle, I have tried to discover the convergence of previous events in his life, his doubts and hesitations, the turning point in his resolution of the conflicting issues, and the interaction between John Baptist and his Brothers with the institutions, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities he had to confront; in a word, the full dimension of the event that occurred. In each case we see an "option" that takes shape, is affirmed, and becomes a reality in the action that follows. The autobiographical documents relating to these events help us to enter into the way St. de

La Salle understood them, what he recognized in them, what he assumed to be present in them, what he allowed to remain there.

Finally, this effort at a systematic use of autobiographical material helps us to see the sequence of events in the life of St. de La Salle, the details that preceded each event and the consequences that followed, the elements of continuity and discontinuity that were present in them. Thus these four key events are not studied as four isolated, unhistorical moments but as indicators of the powerful currents in the history of a person, his "story" presented in accord with the profound significance of the Paschal Mystery which he discerned in his "story."

These four events are the following:

(1) The acts through which St. de La Salle made his decision to accept the vocation to work for the project of the Christian Schools. All of his biographers cite with more or less accuracy "a memoir" written by the Founder about the first years of the new community. This is the autobiographical document that helps us understand this event.

(2) The acts through which St. de La Salle made an irrevocable commitment to the project which he had recognized and accepted in the light of the gospel; he vows all his powers to the work of establishing and consolidating the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Two documents help us understand better the gospel significance of these acts: "The Memoir on the Habit," written to defend the habit and the existence and autonomy of the community, and the Formula of Vows of 1691 and 1694 which shows us beyond any doubt the Paschal dimension of the commitments which have been lived through, affirmed, celebrated, and organized in a project that is responding to the needs of the world.

(3) The acts related to the extension and further consolidation of the work, understood as the work of God. In this event we can understand how St. de La Salle realizes his charism in its full actuality, a gift of the Spirit which he had seen clearly in the beginning (first event), and which led

him to organize a community for a mission (second event). The document that helps us understand the profound meaning of the acts of this third event is the “Rules That I Have Imposed Upon Myself.”

(4) The acts of conflict through which the Founder was led to let go of his authority over the Institute, to decide on a period of absence, and then a total surrender of the role of superior, in order to guarantee the consolidation of the work without him. There were tensions and problems provoked within the community of the Brothers by both external and internal causes. The Christian Schools were not organized within the framework of the educational structures of his time. Certain people were proposing different forms of government for the community. The ultimate consolidation of this work of God was not through constant victories towards a grand triumph at the end of his life. Rather, what began in a radical incarnation, he learned, was destined to lead him to a total emptying of himself (a *kenosis*). The document that helps us interpret this experience is the letter of the Brothers, written to him on April 1, 1714, asking him to return from the South of France to his role as superior. While not an autobiographical statement, it must have touched the heart of his experience profoundly at that time, for it led him to return to the government of the community, but more than ever determined to achieve total self-effacement before his death, in order to confirm the consolidation of “the body of the society.”

The echo of the autobiographical documents in the *Meditations*

I have tried to explain in the foregoing paragraphs that a reading of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* must be preceded by a reading of the “story” of St. de La Salle himself, if we want to find the true level of meaning in these meditations. In a word, we are able to get a clear idea of the fact that the meditations emerge from the lived reality of the Founder’s life only in the measure that we focus on the

powerful language with which St. de La Salle understood and expressed how “the guidance of God, the wisdom of God [the mystery], has guided him from commitment to commitment [history] to take upon himself entirely the care of the teachers and the schools.”

The insistence in the meditations on the divine origin of the Society, on the fact that it was founded only on God, and on the call of its members by God, reminds us of the Founder’s *Mémoire des Commencements* and the *Mémoire sur l’Habit*. The frequent return to an expression like “the work of God,” and the constant playing of this theme in relation to the religious value of the work of the Brother, the unity of his life, the sanctification of his ministry, the participation of the Brother in the mystery of Christ, etc., recalls the language of the *Règles que je me suis imposées* and the *Letter of the Brothers in 1714*. Finally, we also find passages in the meditations which can provide us with a clear echo of the *Formula of Vows*, and even more than any literal correspondence, we can note the fundamental thrust and mutual relationship established by the Formula: to procure the glory of God is to work gratuitously for the salvation of the young through the work of the schools.

Besides all this, we find in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, if not explicit references, at least some passages that have a significant relationship with other writings which were intended for the professional training of the Brothers (the *Conduct of Schools*, the *Rules of Politeness*, the *Duties of a Christian*), or with his ascetical writings (*Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*, the *Collection*). I have also brought out in my dissertation that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* reminds us of the *Rule* of the Institute, notably Chapters 1 and 2, whose general inspiration is very much the same as that of the meditations.

All these relationships allow us to consider the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* as the “summit” from which St. de La Salle was able to view for the first time the full breadth and grandeur of the work of God which he had discerned in his mind when he began, long before, his first

associations with the Brothers in community. With Brother Michel Sauvage we can say: "Irresistibly we think of the Alpine climber who has painfully scaled some rugged mountain and at the top discovers and comprehends the complete course he has travelled. Such a total and wonderful view is given at the end, not at the beginning of a climb" (*Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 1, p. 35).

I would like to add, however, that if the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* constitutes a "summit," it is not only because they were written towards the end of the author's life, nor because we can discover in them specific references to his earlier writings. The image of the "summit" must not be understood in terms that are purely geographic, or even chronological. It seems to me that a study of the meditations makes it clear that we are in the presence of a description by St. de La Salle of a "peak experience," an experience in which he discovers a present moment that is loaded with the totality of a past history and which at the same time is fully open to all of the history that is yet to follow. He has grasped all at once the action of God in his regard, the God Who precedes him, Who calls him, Who urges him forward from within himself and every one of his experiences. He recognizes in this peak experience the "story" of his whole life.

But the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are not only the history of St. de La Salle, they are also a call to the Brothers.

The *Meditations* as a Call to the Brothers to express their own personal "word," their own history

The meditations are, in fact, all written in the second person, something that is not always the case with the meditations written for Sundays and Feasts. They are, then, addressed in a very special way to the Brothers, to each of the Brothers in the community. The communitarian perspective is hardly evident at first sight, but the absence of the term "community" is more apparent than real. For one thing, St. de La Salle is speaking to each of his sons insofar

as he is a part of this group of the “Brothers of the Christian Schools,” of this Institute, of these men “associated together” to give themselves freely to the establishment of schools in the service of the young who are most neglected. For another, the words of St. de La Salle are resounding in “an active community” assembled for its annual retreat. If it is true that the Founder presumes this communitarian reality, it remains nonetheless true that his challenge is addressed to each of the Brothers personally, for the community exists only in the measure that each of its members has been taken over by God, realizes his responsibility for the salvation of the young, and turns then in prayer to the God Who calls him, sends him, supports him, judges him.

We can further state that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* have for their purpose to assist the Brothers in their ascent towards their own “peak experience.” The meditations send the Brothers back to everything that makes up their daily living: the performance of their educational work as well as the program of their community life. The meditations send the Brothers back to the pedagogical and ascetical writings which St. de La Salle has composed for them and to the Rule which they had formulated together. The viewpoint of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, however, is altogether different from that of the functional and governmental writings of the Founder. These meditations seem to hold a place with the *Method of Mental Prayer* and the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*, which are meant to teach the gospel meaning of the Brother’s life throughout the year and give him a vision of his life that is more comprehensive and more dynamic than is found in the other writings. This vision contemplates specifically the significance of the religious experience of the Brother, his commitment in an historical movement, that of his Brothers associated together to procure the glory of God, taking on the mission of the Son under the guidance of the Spirit.

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat do not provide the Brothers with an historical summary of the origins and formation of the Institute. Neither do they give the Brothers

a summary of their identity in the church or of the purpose of their ministry. Nor do they seek merely to build up the Brothers' "ego"; and if they do succeed in making the Brothers more aware of the dignity and the value of their work, it is not because they provide any "recipes" for carrying out that work efficiently.

These meditations go to the heart of the Brothers' life, inviting them to consider, in the spirit of faith and zeal, the actual lived experience of their Institute, the experience of God discovered in their own day-to-day relations with students. When St. de La Salle invites the Brothers to consider their work in the schools, he is not engaging them in considerations that are historical, theological, or pedagogical. He is not urging the Brothers with abstract reasons derived from theological or pedagogical theories, nor even from the Bible. Rather, he invites the Brothers to deepen their understanding, through contemplation and prayer, of the purpose of their being Brothers, not really *what* they are living for but *for whom* they exist as Brothers. The Founder is helping them to study the substance of their daily experience in the educational service they provide and to see the gospel dimensions of this service and all of its demands.

At the same time that the Founder is focusing the Brother's attention in this way on the concrete details of his life, helping him understand better that his way of life with his students constitutes the center of his religious experience, St. de La Salle is inviting the Brother to break through the walls of space and time, revealing to him the reality of the mystery of God at the very heart of this way of life. This opening to the transcendent mystery, far from diminishing the concrete dimensions of the Brother's existence, allows him to see with new eyes the fullness of "his space and time": the here and now of God, where God's work is visible and effective on behalf of the children of the poor. In doing all this St. de La Salle is not plunging the Brother into mere introspection, some closing in upon himself. Rath-

er the Founder is placing the Brother at the heart of “the wonderful things of God” within his own existence, announcing to him “what the Lord is telling today.”

Celebration of the mystery

For the first Brothers, then, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* spoke of an adventure which they had lived through together: the progressive establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools, founded exclusively, radically, on the marvelous action of God in history, the mystery of God’s love, visibly actualized in the creation of a community to respond to the call of the poor who were far off from His saving grace.

These meditations, then, constitute a contemplation of the mystery of the love of God revealing itself and acting in the existence of the Brothers for the salvation of the poor. This reference to the full dimension of the mystery breaks forth several times into an “act of thanksgiving” whose simplicity does not diminish the astonishment which is experienced in the face of “wonderful things” of God. Such admiration and gratitude are by their very nature contagious.

These “wonderful things” of God are not presented as a history of salvation in the past, a doctrine that has been developed from St. Paul. However solid the meditations may be from a doctrinal point of view, they never remain on the level of ideas. They rather seek to be in union with the living reality of the mystery of God Who has guided the Brothers, has called them in their time, has united them in a communion, has sent them to announce the good news of salvation.

St. de La Salle, then, invites the Brothers to recognize in their own history this guidance by God. Free of any paternalism, he avoids acting for the Brothers, speaking their word for them. He calls on the Brothers to read and to live and to speak their own response together in answer to the call of a mission in history that refers exclusively to the mystery of God. He does not want them simply to think

over again the abstract content of some resumé of the truths of faith, even if the resumé of truths may be “applicable” to the externals of their positions as teachers.

The content of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* does constitute an attractive subject for synthesis (cf. *Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 1, pp. 37-42). However, when we speak of the content of these meditations, we must be on guard against a reading which too easily tends to reduce this content to a synthesis of the truths applicable to the Brothers. The interpretation of the meditations must be something entirely different. As I have presented in my own study, this content consists of three major elements: the visible action of God in history; the eschatological purpose, or destiny, of this spiritual, visible action; and the demands of the gospel.

The visible action of God in history

The Brother is invited to become aware of the presence and the pervading action of God in his own history. The personal history of a Brother and the progressive steps of his vocation are a response to the call of children who have been left to themselves. In this history the Brother recognizes a call, a “charismatic gift” for the good of others. He sees himself as a minister of God (Meditations 1 and 2), as a cooperator with Christ (Meditations 3 and 4), whose “functions” (Meditations 5 and 6) are intended to make “visible” the “hidden secret of the wisdom of God,” the salvation offered to all men.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* envision, then, a history of relationships among the Brothers and between each Brother and his students. In these relationships the Brothers and their students give themselves freely to one another, learning to leave a former way of life in order to achieve a new life through conversion and mutual education. It is a life of love and forgiveness, and in living this life they discover and share the experience of the ever present and generous love of God and live as children of God. All this implies a continual process of progressive enlighten-

ment, of renewed life, of growing freedom, all made possible by the generous action of the Spirit of Christ already present and striving towards a final destiny.

In brief, the history commemorated in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is not a history of the past, nor a history of the Brother all by himself. It is rather a history that is taking place here and now in the lives of the Brother and his students as they grow together in their awareness of “the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ,” which has been truly announced and made freely available to them, and which they have made real in their own history.

The Brothers in this sense are “messengers” or “angels” that make “visible,” not just verbally, but actually, in the flesh and blood of their lives (“incarnationally”), a salvation which has not been “telescoped” out of history. Children left on their own can live according to “the wisdom of God,” thanks to His goodness in calling and sending His ministers; these same children can also participate actively in the shaping of the world, thanks to these ministers who share their students’ flesh and blood condition, and who work to free them from a sociological imprisonment where they live without hope.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and especially meditations 1 through 6, though not exclusively, call upon and challenge the Brother’s faith. They make up an invitation to “see”, to remember that he himself has been enlightened in order that he may enlighten others, and to recognize the mystery of the work of God in the visible reality of his work. The Brothers are the workers, the instruments, the cooperators, in this work of God.

Eschatological purpose, or destiny, of this visible, spiritual action of God

The Brother is also invited to become aware of the purpose of this calling, his “charismatic gift.” Meditations 7 through 12 especially, but not exclusively, make very clear the direction and purpose of the entire existence of the

Brother. The Brother has not been given a charismatic gift for himself, but for the good of children, for the building up of the church.

In this sense St. de La Salle invites the Brothers to place their ministry in an historical and apostolic lineage: the Son sent by the Father, the apostles sent by Christ, the bishops as successors of the apostles, the Brothers as ministers of the church sharing and continuing this apostolic heritage (Meditations 7 and 8). Their activities are those of ministers with and for their students. They “guide” with much vigilance towards a knowledge of the mysteries, towards the celebration of these mysteries sacramentally, towards initiation and growth in the Christian life. In this description we could recognize the powerful thrust of the church following the Council of Trent, the efforts in dogma, moral, and worship. But these terms in the Lasallian language, “to instruct, to teach, to guide,” cannot be reduced to a strict concept of dogma, moral, and worship. These Lasallian expressions are all aimed at creating “life according to the Christian spirit,” an expression which constantly returns to the Founder’s pen. Now, this life—the same that is presented in the first six meditations—is the new life, the life of the new covenant, life according to the wisdom of God. It is, therefore, a living participation in the actual reality of the work of God, the body of Christ, sacramentally visible in the work of the church (Meditation 7:3).

This sharing of the students in the “promises and the covenant,” in the body of Christ which grows in history, involves also the relationship of Brother-student. The Brother does not free his students from the “life of the flesh,” except insofar as he himself takes on the flesh and blood condition of their lives, even to the giving of his life. Made free together by the action of the Spirit, in a fraternal union, Brother and students mutually educate one another to live the gospel in their daily lives not only verbally but in the interaction of the words and deeds of teacher and students.

In this interaction the activities of the Brother are those of a prophet who corrects. His charismatic gift makes him

“see” more clearly, and energizes him with “zeal,” driving him irresistibly to neglect nothing in regard to his students, urging them to renounce any shortcomings in their former way of life, supporting them in their conversion, and encouraging them in the new life of the covenant.

In this sense, just as the first six meditations end with “the activities of visible angels,” so the second six meditations end with “the activities of the school,” symbolized in the language of the seventeenth century by the words “reproof and correction.” Over and above the obvious limitations, St. de La Salle very accurately situates the religious experience of the Brother in the hard facts of his “educational relationship,” the interaction of the Brother with his students.

Finally, just as the first six meditations challenge the faith of the Brothers and call upon them to see the dynamic mystery of God in the concrete actions of their ministry, so the second six meditations challenge the zeal of the Brothers. They are continually renewed in their awareness that their faith is totally inseparable from a zeal that drives them to identify with their students even to the point of laying down their lives; that such faith and zeal have no other origin than the power of the Spirit of God, of Christ, and have no other purpose than the purpose of the coming of the Son of Man. This prophetic zeal of the Brother, the grace of his charismatic gift for the work of God which is the work of the church, constitutes the very heart of his continual impulse to identify with the flesh and blood realities of his students, the world in which they live, the poverty of their lives. At the same time the Brother’s zeal never loses its religious dimension, the awareness that all history has already been directed towards its final achievement: the total Christ in whom all men and all the world will be made subject to God.

Demands of the gospel

This thought leads us to the consideration of the third

level of interpretation of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, the renewed awareness of the demands of the gospel that are involved in the Brother's ministry. These meditations, especially the last four, though not exclusively, put the Brothers—the whole fabric of their existence and their activities—under the judgment of the Word of God.

I have already pointed out the tone of thanksgiving (eucharistic) which is characteristic of the meditations. St. de La Salle does not engage the Brothers in mere introspection or a sickly closing in on self. Deeply imbued as he was with the profound meaning of the mystery and the work of God, which had revealed itself to him visibly in his own history, the Founder did not arrive at a concept of the demands of the gospel from some doctrine, nor even from Scripture itself, despite the fact that he often expresses these demands by literal quotations from the Bible. He does not quote Scripture in order to give prescriptions or norms of behavior for the Brother's personal or professional life.

First of all, we must take note that St. de La Salle makes no distinction between the professional and the community life of the Brothers. This "non-distinction" between the search for perfection and professional responsibilities is one of the constants of his own way of life. In this St. de La Salle is quite original; he goes far beyond the authors of his time when he says that the Brother begins to render the account of his zeal for the salvation of others before giving the account of his work for his own salvation. It is the dynamic unity of the Brother's life, of his faith and zeal, this continual drive of his calling, that is submitted to the judgement of the Word of God. In brief, he is judged on the manner in which he brings to realization the charismatic gift he has received with all its serious obligations to the work of God. There is, then, a strict correlation between the importance of God's work and the importance of all educational activities.

In this sense we can say that St. de La Salle does not view community obligations separately from professional obligations. Even in passages where we find allusions to the program for the community or the tasks of the school, the

Founder does not suggest an examination that depends on the *Rule* or on the *Conduct of Schools*.

The seriousness of the judgment is equivalent to the seriousness of the calling, of the gift given for the sake of others. The judgment consists of an invitation to recover continually the impulse of a man who has been seized by God. The full weight of this judgment demands, then, that the Brother continually examine the values that are operative in the style of life he has adopted. Without wanting to give a synthesis of what is subjected to the judgment, I would like to present certain elements which seem important:

First, the judgment which is the subject of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is not structured around “the constitutive elements” of the Brother’s vocation. It is rather an invitation to recover continually in his daily experiences, in his history with others, and especially in his efforts to respond to the call of the poor, the impulse of the power of God that continually takes possession of him, calls him, sends him on mission. It is an invitation to go beyond, but without neglecting, the mediation of structures. If it is preferred, we can say that the judgment will focus on the “charismatic gift”: the gift of instructing, of teaching, of watching, and of the faith. This judgment, then, will not focus on things, on practices, but on clearness of vision, on the energy of his zeal to put his talents into action, on the ability to go beyond routine procedures without ceasing. It is in this kind of perspective that we must read the final meditations, and especially all the even-numbered meditations that speak of the “obligations” concerning particular areas of the Brother’s life. The Founder does not restrict the Brother’s view to structures, to the *Rule*, or the *Conduct of Schools*. He speaks of faith and of zeal and of the impulse that drives a person to discover the mystery of God in the action of his own experience and in the history of the world around him.

Second, the judgment which is the subject of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is not structured around the vows. Beyond the explicit references to the formula of vows, these meditations speak of the radical gift of the Brother

for the glory of God, for the salvation of the poor, or in other words, of the glory of God made visible in the salvation of the poor. The total gift of a life is not defined by legal obligations and, in particular, does not turn the Brother back in upon himself. It is rather a demand to identify with the flesh and blood reality of the students, to humble oneself and to enter fully into their lives, even to giving up one's own life, in order that they might have life.

I have already pointed out that St. de La Salle makes no distinction between the search for salvation and professional obligations. Similarly, ascetical or professional practices are not the matters he calls into the process of judgment. While the Founder does not disregard the program of community life and the activities of the school, which he considers inseparable, nevertheless the focus of attention in his treatment of the judgment of God is the Brother's total surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Asceticism and ministry are here inseparable; they blend in an active contemplation and a contemplative action. The asceticism of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is, in fact, inseparable from a mystical contemplation, that is, from a life and a growth in the Paschal mystery discerned in history and in personal experience. This asceticism is directed to service, to the gift of self to others. It is never a battle against self for its own sake, but is inseparable from ministry and understood as a total docility to the Spirit. It is fidelity to the Spirit Who calls, Who sends, Who is the primary witness and evidence at the judgment of the Brother. This fidelity is seen especially in its ultimate purpose: to announce the gospel.

Since the Brother's life is ultimately related to the purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ, his whole life is subject to the judgment of the Word of God. From this fact follows the necessity to live and to help others live according to the Christian spirit, according to the maxims of the gospel. Scripture is the ultimate rule for the life of the Brother and for his students. But this announcing of the gospel is not reduced to practices and prescriptions. It is not, for example, reduced to teaching catechism. The obligation to teach sec-

ular subjects is inseparable from the obligation to teach and instruct the students in the Christian spirit. Nor does “announcing the gospel” consist only in giving good example, nor even in searching to give an explicit witness. Rather, it means that the Brother must become “incarnate,” that is, take on the flesh and blood realities of the students’ lives in an affective and effective manner, to walk around in their shoes, to unite his own “history” to that of his students, to the whole history of salvation, to the mystery of Christ. It means that the Brother must be open, along with his students in an explicit manner, to the demands of a way of life illustrated in the gospel, to the “morality” of the new covenant with God, to the Paschal morality in accord with the freedom of the Spirit. It also means that the Brother must educate his students in the meaning of the sacramental celebration of this new life, uniting them in this way within the edifice of the church.

The focus of the judgment, then, is not pedagogical practice, but rather the aim and design of all the proceedings of the Brother with his students, all their efforts together to achieve true freedom, to create fraternal communion, to build a new world. We must not get the wrong impression when St. de La Salle refers rather frequently to “intentions.” This is not to be understood as a spirituality of motives, but as an attitude of mind that focuses on the meaning of all life, the eschatological goal of the mystery of the gospel, a way of life that is expressed effectively and increasingly not just inside the walls of the school but everywhere, since the Brothers are called to help their students to live, and to live continually everywhere, according to the Christian spirit.

Finally, as a man of hope the Brother never settles down. In the midst of all this process of growth, he constantly keeps his eyes focused on the eschatological joy that is yet to be revealed. From this point of vantage he is able to protest against all fixation on the past, against anything that is opposed to the Spirit in himself, in his community, in his students. The glory and the joy that he awaits is already present in even the most ordinary, everyday activities—joy and the

seriousness of the judgment, which are not in conflict since they both meet in the day-to-day fabric of the Brother's life.

The role of Scripture in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*

In fact Scripture is the foundation and the substance of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. However, St. de La Salle did not restrict himself to "using" Scripture as an "authority" in order to "prove" something. The investigation which I have made in my dissertation on the recourse to Scripture in the meditations illustrates that the Founder's approach is entirely foreign to this simplistic understanding of Scripture. Here I will limit myself to the presentation of the principal conclusions of my study.

Point of departure

The point of departure of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*—if it is necessary to speak in these terms—is not from Scripture on one side and from life on another. St. de La Salle is meditating on the history which he lived with his Brothers as they brought into reality together a common project which united them: to keep schools, to rescue the poor from their hopeless condition, and to help them enter meaningfully into the history of the world and of salvation. Now this is where the role of Scripture must be placed.

From one point of view Scripture is anterior to the experience of St. de La Salle: He had studied it beforehand, he had made it a part of himself. Scripture had guided his life, had been a companion to him, had impelled him to make certain breaks with his past, had engaged him to become "incarnate" (take on the flesh and blood realities of life) with the teachers, to assume the work of the schools. When towards the end of his life he composed the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, it was truly in the light of Scripture that he understood the real meaning of the history of the Society of the Brothers: the "wonderful things of God" in the church today.

But the written word does not turn him back to a past

that took place during the time of the apostles. He does not use Scripture as a collection of truths applicable to the Brothers today, or as norms to which they must conform. Rather, he considers Scripture as the privileged witness to the Word of God in action, which acted with fidelity in the past and which spoke definitively in God's Son, who is still living and building his body which is the church by the action of his Spirit and who will continue to do so until it is complete.

In the light of Scripture St. de La Salle understands and invites his Brothers to understand this history of the Society as the history of a faithful God Who began everything, Who brings His saving plan to reality everyday, Who will faithfully bring it to a successful conclusion at the Return of Christ.

In this connection the first and last quotations from Scripture in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are very significant. The first speaks of the saving will of the God of creation for all men and women (1 Tim. 2:4). The last presents the reward of the Brother (Apoc. 22:14). These two quotations show, to a certain extent even in their literal meaning, that the Founder's thought is moving in the living plan of the history of salvation, from the original call of man up to the final completion of universal salvation through Jesus Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is in this magnificent framework that St. de La Salle lives and reads and invites his Brother to read and live the here and now of God's saving grace.

Three types of citation

What I want to emphasize is that for St. de La Salle the gospel which he so often cites is not a dead book but the good news of the present, living action of the Spirit of God made visible in the action and the interacting relationships of teachers and students. The Founder refers to Scripture in order to refer the Brothers and their students to the transcendent totality of the history of salvation, to root them in

their here and now, and to call them to live the gospel in the here and now of their lives.

My systematic study of all the New Testament references in the meditations shows that the introductory formulas of these citations, as well as the meaning of these citations in the line of thought of the Founder, allow a classification of his recourse to Scripture into three categories:

Sometimes St. de La Salle cites Scripture as a *profession of faith*. This is not some “proof” derived from Scripture as an authority. It is not an abstract, timeless truth. In these citations the Founder is reading a fact of ecclesial life today which has been part of the reality of the Brothers’ life within the full history of God’s plan. The reference is intended to break through the limits of space and time as they are lived by the Brothers, or better still, to open the eyes of his disciples so that they can see what is really at play in their humble tasks: the realization of the plan of God. But this openness to the transcendent reality of their lives, far from making them escape from the hard facts of life, drives them to be even more practical and more fundamental in their commitments, since what is at play has an “historical-eschatological” meaning totally beyond any superficial understanding.

Sometimes also St. de La Salle alludes to apostolic times. It is not because he wants to reconstruct them in some archeological fashion. These are citations which I have called *citations of remembrance (Mémoire)*, since he is reading the today of the Brother in a remembrance of the fidelity of God Who has acted powerfully in history and continues to do the same here and now in the concrete commitments of the Brothers. These citations open up the historical-eschatological-sacramental dimension of life in harmony with apostolic times, and they invite the Brothers to become more and more rooted in this history, to see in themselves more and more clearly the action of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ.

More often Scripture is cited without any formula of introduction and is declared directly in reference to the Brothers. In these citations the Founder places the entire

life of the Brothers under the judgment of the Word of God, not to crush them into being afraid, but to invite them to renew within themselves ceaselessly the vitality of their faith and zeal, to evaluate their activities, and to verify the authenticity of their educational relationships in the light of the gospel. These are the citations which I have named the *citations of the "call."*

This threefold manner of citing Scripture leads us to avoid an expression like, "St. de La Salle *uses* Scripture," for he does not use it for a rhetorical purpose or to apply some definitions to the obligations of the Brothers, nor even to prove the value of their state, or the meaning of the purpose of their Institute. In one sense Scripture does not come to him from outside, but the words which he cites come from a "gut level"—from the lived reality of the life he has lived and which he has contemplated in the light of faith.

For these reasons, at least in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, revelation does not appear as a "truth" which breaks through from the beyond nor as a power emanating from the past. It is rather the "today" of God, full of remembrance and eschatological tension, lived in the church where the Book of Scripture unveils the word and the power of the God Who is living, Who has shown Himself definitively in Christ, and Who is acting all through history by His Spirit until the final fulfillment at the end of time.

One final observation should be mentioned on the place of the great Pauline synthesis on the Mystery of God and on the work of the ministry. The passage of 1 Corinthians 3:9-10, constitutes a pivotal thought in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*: it is the work of God to which the Brother contributes according to the gift that is given to him, the grace with which God endows him. Without pretending to see in St. de La Salle a forerunner of modern exegesis, I have been struck by the fact that the Founder has intuitively followed the theological itinerary of St. Paul, and in particular the progressive development of his reflection on the mystery of the wisdom of God from the time of the first syntheses in the First Epistles to the Thessalonians and to the Corin-

thians up to the later syntheses in the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians.

In the first six meditations especially, the Pauline theme of both Epistles to the Corinthians is often amplified by citations from the Epistles to the Colossians and to the Ephesians and declared directly in reference to the Brothers. Far from diminishing the important role of the religious experience of the Brothers, this transcendent enlargement of the meaning of their work as the work of God serves only to heighten the value of the identity and the purpose of their ministry.

In the second six meditations, especially in the seventh, it is striking to note that St. de La Salle reads in remembrance the apostolic experience of the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the Epistle to the Galatians and understands this experience in the light of the correct apostolic theme as developed in the later synthesis of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Even more than in the first six meditations, the historical-eschatological dimension implied in these later meditations invites the Brother to look upon all history from a profoundly religious point of view and to see himself as a man seized by God's Spirit, endowed with a charism that drives him with zeal for the new covenant between God and all men. As Jesus Christ became the bridegroom of his church and gave his life out of love, so the Brother gives himself totally to the welfare of children and is ready to lay down his life for the sake of those in his care.

Finally, in the last four meditations, whose dominant theme is the eschatological joy of the judgment, it is not surprising to find that the citations of remembrance, referring to the apostolic experience of the Epistles to the Corinthians, are read at the same time in the light of the later synthesis of the First Epistle to the Ephesians and the earlier synthesis of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, which we know has a strong emphasis on the eschatological theme. In these meditations, far from turning the Brothers in upon themselves or in upon their institutions, St. de La Salle calls upon them to be serious about God's prophetic judgment and to evaluate constantly their lives and their activities.

The wealth of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* could not have escaped the notice and appreciation of the first Brothers. The words of the Founder reminded them of all they had lived through together from the beginning, when God first called them to take on the mission of the Son of Man to announce the gospel to the poor. These meditations challenged their on-going experience in their own explicit language, not only to evaluate their institutions, but especially to see more clearly the spirit which had aroused them as a “body” with a specific purpose: to associate together and by association to keep schools where the gospel would be announced free of charge.

These were the “gut words” of St. de La Salle. They constitute his “destiny,” the place where he finally arrived. Consider in this light the progress under the influence of the gospel that is implied in the difference between the first reactions of St. de La Salle when he felt that the original teachers were lower than his valet, and such expressions that he uses in the meditations when he calls the Brothers, ministers of God, co-workers with Christ, ministers of the church.

The place where he finally arrived also became for the Brothers in their annual retreat the place where they could start again: by a renewed awareness of the spirit of their Society; by a renewed awareness of their eschatological purpose; by a renewed awareness of the gospel demands on the “living members” of the Institute.

If these *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* could speak this way to the first Brothers, we must ask ourselves now if they have anything to say to us today.

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat and the Brothers Today

These meditations were originally concerned with the heart of the experiences of the first Brothers, but the cultural context of these experiences has changed radically. We must, therefore, ask ourselves if the meditations have anything to say to us today.

Limitations of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat

It is clearly not true that the meditations are in their entirety timeless and good for all times in all their details. In no way can they have some magical way of speaking to the details of our experience today. This is why I want to point out some of their limitations, so that understood in the light of these, they can be read with greater profit.

Limitation of Language

It is quite evident that the meditations are rooted in a particular cultural milieu. The direct influence of a similar work by Giry, the use of the classic arguments to prove the importance of the catechetical ministry, the central place given to the mystery of the Cross and the mission of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of several pedagogical ideas, all these elements in the meditations bear witness to the apostolic and cultural framework within which the meditations were written. It follows that there are definite limitations in the theological, anthropological, and even pedagogical language and thought. Good examples of such limitations are the concept of "corrupt nature," or the phrase, salvation of "souls," and the references to angels and the devil. Similar limitations of word and thought are found in the description of the child's learning process, the manner of correcting faults, even the theology of redemption, and the opposition expressed between "speculative" and "practical" truths.

In my dissertation I show at several points how this lan-

guage could be interpreted, not in the light and language of present perspectives (which would be anachronistic), but in the thought of St. de La Salle himself taken in its totality and especially in its full purpose and meaning. Nevertheless, the explicit meaning of the language of St. de La Salle must be recognized. It would be less than honest to eliminate certain passages which seem no longer in harmony with our taste or with our manner of speaking.

Limitations of structure

It would be a twisting of the thought of St. de La Salle to attempt to find in the meditations a synthesis of his entire thought. True, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* give certain powerful currents of his thought, the very currents of the way of life he chose in response to the inspiration and charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit. However, it must be admitted that these powerful thoughts must not be separated from other texts, especially other major texts, such as the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. In fact, from a doctrinal point of view, certain basic themes in the thought of St. de La Salle are missing in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, for example: community and obedience.

Limitations of difficult reading

The meditations are not easy reading. This is partly due to the different uses of Scripture and to the unpolished style of the writing. It must be remembered particularly that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* speak of a spiritual experience that has been lived through in the history of one man's lifetime. In any experience there is always something that cannot be communicated. The words of a historical account can only help us come near to this experience. The meditations, then, cannot tell us everything. Any writing, even the most thorough autobiography, is only an incomplete presentation, however organized, of an experience.

For this reason the meditations demand a serious effort, a real endeavor to share in a spiritual way of life that has been lived by another person. This is the major problem:

Does this spiritual experience of St. de La Salle and of the first Brothers have anything to say to us today?

The experience of St. de La Salle at the origin of the Institute and our experience today

We cannot read the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, even if it is one of the great texts of French spirituality of the seventeenth century, and pretend that nothing has happened between the time when St. de La Salle wrote his meditations and our time today.

Our cultural framework

It is commonplace to observe that we are living in a world of profound and rapid change, of social and cultural transformations, which seriously affect our understanding of religious experience. This cultural explosion has repercussions that are especially experienced in the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Brother looks upon his consecration to the gospel in the service of education as a direct involvement in the construction of this world. In this his perspective is directed to the future, engaged as he is with the most sensitive element of society: youth. It is the young people of today who are the most affected by the changes that are occurring, because it is the young who are called upon not only to learn the techniques for integrating themselves harmoniously into society but to learn how “to be” in an entirely new way, in order to make society itself something new.

Similarly, we have been witnesses and agents of rapid changes in the understanding of what the church is meant to be, with many “models” of the church coming and going at the same time, often creating tension not only between different persons but even within individual persons themselves. Religious education has probably been one of the major forces to develop new models of the church, and yet religious education itself has undergone rapid and profound changes within a relatively short period of time. We have

experienced a transition from a so-called “traditional” method of catechesis (to know what must be believed, practised, fulfilled) to a “kerygmatic” method, and now to yet another, more dynamic concept based on a better understanding of anthropology and sustained by a more adequate theology of revelation.

Beyond all this, the “spiritual experience” of a Brother is rooted every day in the context of a school, which itself is undergoing profound changes and is calling sometimes for total renovation. He is involved with youth that are often impatient and challenging. He is confronted with numerous efforts to discover completely new alternatives in the whole field of education.

Our cultural framework and that of St. de La Salle

It is clear that our cultural framework is altogether different from that of St. de La Salle. If it is true that the inspiration for the Institute of the Brothers was not developed from the forms of the religious life that were standard in those days, it is no less true that the language, the structures of government, and the concept of the school, while creative, all emerge from the matrix of the “model” of the church and its cultural milieu which was fixed in space and in time.

But we do find some analogies between the time of the birth of the Institute and the present day. Today, as then, the school has fallen into disrepute and teachers are engaged in a difficult work without knowing exactly where they are going. Today, perhaps, we are experiencing some of the insecurities of the first teachers of the Founder.

However, this does not necessarily mean that St. de La Salle has something to tell us. To pose such questions as “What would the Founder say or do today in America?” or “Does St. de La Salle have anything to tell us regarding this or that question?” seems at best to propose hypotheses.

What is the role today for the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*?

Perhaps I have given the impression that St. de La Salle has nothing to tell us. Actually I think that today it is only ourselves that we can ask for answers to our questions. It is only in our own here and now that we can ask ourselves about the gospel meaning of our spiritual experience. This can be done only in my own personal way of life, chosen in the midst of a community of men of faith who are choosing their way of life along with me, as we search to understand the call of the needs of the world and strive to respond to it.

The charism of the Founder today

The Chapter of 1966-67 has emphasized that the charism of the Founder resides in the Brothers of today. Fidelity to the Founder is conceived in terms that are relational and historical. While the Chapter recognized that the "gift" of the Spirit is manifested in the life and writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, it emphasized that fidelity to this gift is not to be understood as a return to the past, or as a literal fidelity to established structures.

On the contrary, this fidelity cannot be lived and realized except in a community effort and determination to respond to the call of the present needs of our times. Only in this way can we share in the spirit which moved the Founder in his response in his time.

Specifically the Chapter declared that attention to the world of today and fidelity to the Founder are united in a single act of fidelity by the Holy Spirit:

Fidelity to the present moment of history and fidelity to the Founder, far from opposing or excluding each other, are closely related, provided we do not expect Saint John Baptist de La Salle to have known in advance all our problems and the answers to all our questions.

The Chapter discovered in all the dimensions of the present moment its capacity for "remembrance," remembrance in its most profound, even Paschal, meaning, and along with remembrance, the capacity for hope. Attention then to the present, remembrance of the past, and hope for

continuity of the project for the future, all take place within the historical process by which the Brother is progressively integrated into a community with a specific purpose. Thus the questions of identity and purpose are inseparable and are placed in a "mystic" perspective flowing from the charismatic gift of an ecclesial ministry, not from any abstract or general conception of the "religious life."

The question, "For what purpose am I a Brother?" becomes "For whom am I a Brother?" The Brother's spiritual way of life and his recognition of a charismatic gift are not isolated products but are united in the roots of his personal history, in the spark of his original inspiration; his way of life also continues to grow with endless vigor under the power and the light of the Holy Spirit.

His way of life is open not only to others who surround him today, but to historical perspectives far more extensive: the whole spiritual dynamism of the church which is ever open to the continually new action of the Holy Spirit. It is in view of all this that we can better appreciate the role of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* today.

The *Meditations* and the charismatic gift of the Brother today

To become aware of the continual, ever new growth of his spiritual way of life and of the gift of his ecclesial ministry, this is the precise help that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* can provide for a Brother today.

Without neglecting the other writings of the Founder, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* can help us in a special way to rediscover our capacity for remembrance and our Paschal hope in the response we give to the signs of the times today.

It can happen in the course of the school year that scholastic responsibilities and community problems lead to a loss of perspective which is experienced in such a deeply personal way that it can't be expressed in any abstract generalizations. I don't mean that it is inevitable that the school year always ends with a loss of perspective. But often enough

there occurs an absolutizing of one's experiences, of structures, even of the manner of looking at educational functions. It can even happen that the religious dimension of very concrete commitments is lost and that religious experience itself is cut off from the work of everyday living. I do not wish to suggest that the work of the Brothers leads inevitably to such a crisis. But without entering into the very personal and unique domain of such individual and community crises, a Brother becomes a Brother only for others, for a mission. Now this living synthesis that is made from one day to the next is never achieved. In times of crises (crises which are revelatory), as well as in good times, the Brothers are committed to live the gospel as a living word, not a dead one. They must seek in community to be profoundly in harmony with the gospel in their daily actions, with that new life that unites with and gives form to the world by the power of the Spirit of the new covenant.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* do not give a "definition" of the components (constitutive elements) of the life of the Brother or of the purpose of the Institute. They do not furnish "recipes" or norms to guarantee the gospel flavor of the Brother's existence. But they do question the Brother at the very heart of his spiritual way of life: the fulfillment of the ecclesial charism he has received for the benefit of the body of Christ growing up in the world.

The *Meditations* and the celebration of the continual pouring forth of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is ever active in the life of a minister endowed with a charismatic gift.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* can speak to me if I bring to my reading of them my own "story," if I keep with me the full dimension of my personal way of life, the details of my daily existence, the persons involved in these details, the words said, and the decisions made, the commitments to which I have given myself.

My whole "story" read in the light of these meditations

can bring me to prayer, a prayer that is inseparable from my ministry, prayer which is not reduced to “intervals” or the “powerful moments” of the annual retreat. It will be a prayer that is a joyous contemplation and celebration:

Celebration of a life that is lived in openness to the total Mystery of God, and is developing, even by means of my most simple activities . . .

Celebration of gratitude for the goodness of God, for His Providence, for His call, for the charismatic gift which reveals His saving action, His glory; for the mystery of Christ, who reveals himself in the saving of the young . . .

Celebration of the joyful poverty of the minister, a poverty that comes from the very problems of the minister and his ministry, an awareness that it is God Who saves, that He alone can touch hearts through the ministry of weak humans, fragile ministers; a poverty that becomes a confident beggar, asking to be filled with His Spirit in order to be the “good news” for others . . .

Celebration of the confidence of the minister, based on the fidelity of God Who chooses, calls, sends; confidence, because he is invited to place his trust in the gifts of God; confidence which becomes trust in others, a commitment to affirm the best in others; confidence in the ability of the young, even the most difficult, to become free, to grow, to give themselves for the sake of others . . .

Celebration of hope as the very origin of his commitment, as the basis for his willingness to die, as the dynamism of his tentative assurance already begun in Jesus Christ, for which the Spirit is the guarantee; hope which is also a challenge to go beyond self, to be always on the move, without compromise, challenging in himself, in his community, in his students, anything that opposes the action of the Spirit working to bring everyone to the freedom of the family of God . . .

Celebration, then, of my own “story”, seen as a Paschal way of life, with its heights and its depths, as the recreating, enlightening, redeeming, freeing action of God; an action that is visible and effective in me to the degree that I am a

person filled with the Spirit of God for others; it is a challenge, then, to live my way of life as a continual incarnation in the flesh and blood world of my pupils, dying to myself, a *kenosis* even to the end of my life, so that the young may have life to the full and come to the glory which is their destiny; it is a challenge to assume continually the mission of the Son of Man, of the Good Shepherd, with his power, not of authority but of service, capturing the very rhythm of the hymn to Christ in the Epistle to the Philippians, to live today the Paschal way of life, growing always in the Spirit of Christ.

In summary, the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* are without doubt a hymn to the Holy Spirit, a Eucharistic prayer in the style of the First Epistle to the Ephesians, an act of thanksgiving for the reality of the Spirit's action experienced in my life history and in all my human relations, for His continual presence at the heart of all my experience, at the heart of the experience of all my students, at the heart of the whole world. These meditations are an act of thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit of God because He is the continual source of the gift I have received, which is always new, which constantly floods my entire life and my work with the students who have been entrusted to me. These meditations are an act of gratitude for the impulse of the Spirit which urges me on to a total gift of myself. They are an act of thanksgiving for the initiative and the energy to offer and to receive the free personal gift which is at the heart of all my human relations, which is the foundation of the new world we are building together. Finally, they are an act of thanksgiving for all these spiritual gifts of the Father which provide the strength to go constantly beyond ourselves, urging us to new life by a continual passage from death to life, giving up the past, ever seeing new possibilities in the life of the new covenant, possibilities of love and of pardon, encouraging the weak, sustaining everyone, confirming always the best in all of us.

The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, then, are able to lead us to this type of ineffable prayer, to this personal

dialogue between God and a Brother, wherein the Brother is continually rediscovering the action of God in his own life, the eschatological purpose of his ministry, the demands of this ministry.

In closing this Introduction I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Brother Michel Sauvage who has always affirmed the best in me and who has guided me in my research, to my community at Adamstown which has encouraged me to take the time to continue this research, and to the community of Jeremy House which has welcomed me with fraternal friendship during the time I have worked on this particular task. Last, but not least, I want to thank Brother Augustine Loes, who not only decided to undertake the translation of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, but also (after cajoling me to write it) agreed to translate this Introduction when he found out that I had written it in French.

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MEDITATIONS

The Meditations for the Time of Retreat form a veritable hymn to the Holy Spirit that can help us in a very special way in our personal and community prayer life and in the spiritual renewal of the Institute. For these meditations sing of the charism of our Institute, the gift of the Holy Spirit which is always renewing itself in an unforeseeable present moment that is ever new, a moment that embraces the holy remembrance of the past with a confident hope in the future, prayer and ministry, community and mission, education and religious formation, all inseparable in the experience and the way of life of the Brother who is moved by the Spirit and who is continually contemplating the mystery of God revealing Himself visibly in the action of his ministry to youth, especially those most in need.

God in His Providence Has Established the Christian Schools

(1)

God is so good that He not only brings us into existence by His act of creation but also desires that all of us come to the knowledge of truth. This truth is God Himself and all that He has willed to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through His apostles, and through His church. God desires all of us to be taught this knowledge, that our minds may be enlightened by the light of faith.

We cannot be taught the mysteries of our religion unless we have the good fortune to hear about them, and we cannot have this advantage unless someone preaches the word of God. "How can they believe," the Apostle says, "unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach?"

God diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge throughout the world by human ministers. Just as He commanded light to shine out of darkness, so He also kindles a light in the hearts of those whom He has called to announce His word to children, to enlighten them by making the glory of God known to them.

Since God in His mercy has given you such a ministry, do not falsify His word but gain glory before Him by proclaiming His truth to those whom you are called to teach. Let this be your continual effort in the lessons you give them, looking upon yourselves as the ministers of God and the administrators of His mysteries.

(2)

One of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion. But most parents are not sufficiently enlightened in these matters; some are taken up with their material needs and the support of their family; others, under the constant concern of earning the necessities of life for themselves and their children, cannot take the time to teach their children their duties as Christians.

In His providential care, God has appointed others to take the place of fathers and mothers in this responsibility. He sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal to help children attain the knowledge of God and His mysteries. According to the grace of Jesus Christ given to them by God, they are like good master-builders who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian virtue in the hearts of these children, many of whom would otherwise be abandoned.

You have been called by God to this ministry and you have been given the grace of teaching and the gift of exhortation for the sake of those entrusted to your responsibility. Use these gifts you have received with care and vigilance in order to fulfill the main duty of fathers and mothers towards their children.

(3)

Not only does God will that everyone come to the knowledge of truth, but He wants everyone to be saved. He cannot truly desire this without providing the necessary means, without giving children the teachers who will assist them in the fulfillment of His plan.

St. Paul says that God has a field which He cultivates, a building which He is constructing, that He has chosen you to help in this work by announcing to children the gospel of His Son and the truths that are contained in it.

This is why you must glory in your ministry and keep trying to save some of these children. According to the expression of St. Paul, God has made you His ministers in order to reconcile others to Him. He has entrusted to you the message of reconciliation for these children. Appeal to them as if God were appealing through you, for you have been destined to cultivate these young plants by announcing to them the truths of the Gospel.

Provide them with the means of salvation appropriate to their development. Teach them without using clever words, lest the cross of Christ, source of our sanctification, become void of meaning: Nothing you say would produce any fruit in their minds or hearts. For these children are simple and for the most part poorly brought up. Those who help them to save themselves must speak simply, so that every word will be clear and easy to understand.

Be faithful to this in order to do as much as you are able and as God requires of you for the salvation of those whom He has entrusted to you.

What Teachers Must Do to Procure the Sanctification of Their Students

(1)

CONSIDER that it is only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over as if they had no home, until they are able to be put to some work. These parents have no concern to send their children to school because they are too poor to pay teachers, or else they have to go out to look for work and leave their children to fend for themselves.

The results of this condition are regrettable. These unfortunate children, accustomed to an idle life for many years, have great difficulty when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins which later on are very difficult to stop, the bad habits having been contracted over so long a period of time.

God has had the goodness to remedy so great a misfortune by the establishment of the Christian Schools, where the teaching is offered free of charge and entirely for the glory of God, where children are kept all day and learn reading, writing, and their religion. In these schools the children are always kept busy, so that when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment.

Thank God that He has had the goodness to call upon you to procure such an important advantage for children. Be faithful and exact to do this without any payment, so that you can say with St. Paul, "The source of my consolation is to announce the gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear me."

(2)

It is not enough that children be kept in school for most of the day and be kept busy. Those who are called upon to teach them must devote themselves especially to bring them up in the Christian spirit.

This spirit gives children the wisdom of God which none of the princes of this world have known. It is completely opposed to the spirit and wisdom of the world, for which we must inspire children with a great disgust, since it is a cover-up for sin. Children cannot be too much separated from such a great evil, because this alone can make them displeasing to God.

Let this be your first concern, then, and the first effect of your vigilance in your work, to be ever attentive to your students to forestall any action that is bad, or even the least improper. Help them avoid anything that has the slightest appearance of sin.

It is also of great importance that your vigilance over your students encourage them to be reserved and quiet in church and at the prayers that are said in school. For training in religion is useful in every way. It gives a great facility for avoiding sin and for practising other acts of virtue because of the amount of grace it brings to those who acquire it.

Do you act in this way with your students? Adopt these practices in the future if you have not been faithful enough in the past.

(3)

In order to bring the children you teach to take on the Christian spirit, you must teach them the practical truths of faith in Jesus Christ and the maxims of the gospel with at least as much care as you teach the truths that are purely doctrinal. It is true that there are a number of doctrines which are absolutely necessary for us to know in order to be

saved. Nevertheless, it would be of little value for us to know these doctrines, if we did not take the trouble to practise the good to which we are bound. Faith, as St. James says, without good works is dead.

St. Paul also says that, if I know all the mysteries and have full knowledge and all the faith great enough to move mountains from one place to another, but have not love (that is, sanctifying grace), I am nothing.

Is your main care, then, to instruct your disciples in the maxims of the holy gospel and the practices of Christian virtue? Have you anything more at heart than helping them find their happiness in these practices? Do you look upon the good that you are trying to achieve in them as the foundation of all the good that they will practise for the rest of their lives? The habits of virtue that are cultivated during youth encounter less resistance from selfishness and form the deepest roots in the heart.

If you want the instructions you give those whom you teach to be effective in drawing them to the practice of good, you must practise these truths yourselves. You must also be full of zeal. It is zeal which makes your students capable of receiving a share in the grace which is in you for doing good. For your zeal draws upon you the Spirit of God. It is this Spirit Who gives your students the power to practise good.

Those Who Teach the Young Are Cooperators with Jesus Christ in the Saving of Souls

(1)

ALTHOUGH JESUS CHRIST has died for everyone, the benefit of his death is not realized by everyone because all do not make the effort to accept it. Each of us must realize redemption personally by a union of our will with the will of God.

The death of Jesus Christ was more than sufficient to wipe out all of our sins and be a complete reparation, for God has reconciled us to Himself in Jesus Christ. But the grace that he merited for us does not bring about our salvation unless our will is brought into union with his. It is up to each of us to realize and complete the work of our own redemption.

It is for this reason that St. Paul speaks very correctly when he says of himself, "I fill up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ."

Is there something lacking, then, in the sufferings of Christ? Nothing, certainly, on the part of Jesus Christ, but on the part of this holy apostle, as well as everyone else, what is lacking is the union of our will with the will of God. Each of us expresses this by uniting our sufferings with those of Jesus Christ as members of his body, suffering with him and for him.

Since you are obliged to help your disciples to save themselves, you must lead them to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Their actions are made holy by his merits and consecration, becoming through him pleasing to God and a means of their salvation. This is how you must teach them to benefit from the death of Jesus Christ,

our Lord, and to realize in themselves the advantages and merit of his death.

(2)

Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your teaching as if he were teaching them. They must be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ comes from your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach, that he has given you authority over them.

They are a letter which Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God. For the Spirit acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ. He helps you overcome all the obstacles to their salvation, enlightening them in the person of Jesus Christ and helping them avoid all that could be displeasing to him.

In order to fulfill your responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you, frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit.

(3)

All your care for the children entrusted to you would be useless if Jesus Christ himself did not give the power, the quality, and the energy that is needed to render your care useful. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself (our Lord says), unless it remains attached to the vine, so neither can you bear fruit, if you do not remain in me. This will be the glory of My Father, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

What Jesus Christ says to his apostles he also says to you, that you may understand that all the good you are able to do in your work for those entrusted to you will be true and effective only insofar as Jesus Christ gives it his blessing and as you remain united with him. It is the same for you as it is for a branch. It can bear fruit only if it remains attached to the vine and draws its sap and strength from the vine. This is the source of all the goodness of the fruit.

Jesus Christ wants you to understand from this comparison that the more your work is energized by him, the more it will produce good in your disciples. This is why you must ask him earnestly that all your teaching be energized by his Spirit and draw all its power from him. Just as he is the one who gives light to everyone coming into the world, he also gives light to the spirit of your students and leads them to love and to practise the good that you teach them.

FOURTH MEDITATION

How to Be True Cooperators with Jesus Christ for the Salvation of Children

(1)

BE CONVINCED of what St. Paul says, that you plant and water the seed, but it is God through Jesus Christ Who makes it grow, that He is the One Who brings your work to fulfillment. So, when you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your teaching and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work.

Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the gospel seeking the lost sheep, placing it upon his shoulders, and bringing it back to the fold. Since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing. Ask him for the grace needed to bring about the conversion of the hearts of those in your care.

You must, then, devote yourself very thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask.

(2)

Jesus Christ, speaking to his apostles, said that he gave an example to them that they might do as he had done. He also wanted his disciples to be with him at all the conversions he brought about, so that they could see how he acted and take him as the rule and model for all they would do to win others to God.

This is also what you must do, since Jesus Christ has chosen you among so many others to be his cooperators in the salvation of souls. You must study in the gospel how Jesus brought his disciples to practise the truths of the gospel. Sometimes he proposed as a happiness everything that the world considers a misfortune, like poverty, injuries, insults, slander, and every kind of persecution for the sake of justice, telling his disciples that they ought to be glad and rejoice when such events happen to them. At other times he inspired disgust for the sins which are ordinarily committed, or he proposed virtues to practise, such as, gentleness, humility, and the like. He also told them that unless their holiness surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees (who bothered themselves about externals only), they would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Lastly he wanted the rich and those who have their pleasures in this world to be regarded as unfortunate.

It is according to these practices and all the others of Jesus Christ that you must teach the Christian youth entrusted to you.

(3)

In carrying out your service to children, you will not fulfill your ministry adequately if you conform only to the external actions of Jesus Christ in his guidance and in his conversion of souls. You must also enter into his way of thinking and adopt his goals. He came on earth, as he himself said, that all might have life and have it to the full. This

is why he said in another place that his words are spirit and life. By this he meant that his words procure the true life, which is the life of the soul—for those who hear them and, with gladness over what they have heard, act on them with love.

This must be your goal when you teach your disciples, that they live a Christian life and that your words become spirit and life for them. Your words will accomplish this, first, because they will be produced by the Spirit of God living in you, and second, because they will procure for your disciples the Christian spirit. In possessing this spirit, which is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, they will live that true life which is so valuable because it leads surely to eternal life.

Guard against any human attitude towards your disciples; do not pride yourself over what you do. These two things are capable of spoiling all the good there is in carrying out your service. Name something you have in this regard that you have not received. If, then, you have received it, why are you boasting as if it were your own?

Keep the goals of your work as clear as those of Jesus Christ himself, so that you will draw his blessing and grace upon yourself and all your labors.

Those Chosen by Providence for the Work of Education Must Fulfill the Functions of Guardian Angels Towards Children

(1)

IT CAN BE SAID that children at birth are like a bundle of flesh. Their minds do not seem to emerge from matter except with time, becoming refined only little by little. As a result, school children usually are not able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good teachers, like visible angels, to help them learn these things.

Angels have this advantage over humans, that their minds do not depend on a body, whereas the human mind rarely operates without the functioning of the senses. Angels are, therefore, far more enlightened than humans and are able to help them come to a much more clear understanding than possible on the level of the human mind alone. As guardians, angels share their understanding of the true good and they help the human race come to a more living knowledge of God, of His perfections, of all that is related to God and the means of going to Him.

Christian truths are hidden from the human mind. If this is true of human nature generally, it is incomparably more true of children, whose minds are more clouded because they are less free of their senses and material things. Children, then, need someone to develop the Christian truths for them in a more concrete fashion, one that is harmonious with the limitations of their minds. Otherwise they often remain all their lives insensitive and opposed to thoughts of God. They will be incapable of knowing or enjoying spiritual things.

For this purpose the goodness of God has provided children with teachers who will instruct them in all these spiritual truths. Admire this goodness of God, providing for all the needs of His creatures, taking the means to procure for them the knowledge of the true good, that is, the salvation of souls. Offer yourself to Him for this purpose, to assist the children entrusted to you as far as He will require of you.

(2)

To be saved it is not enough to be instructed in the Christian truths that are purely doctrinal. As we have said already, faith without works is dead; it is like a body without a soul; it cannot bring about our salvation.

It is, then, not enough to provide children with a Christian mentality and teach them the mysteries and doctrines of our religion. We must also teach them the practical maxims that are found throughout the holy gospel. But since they do not yet have the powers of mind to understand and practise them by themselves, you must act like visible angels for them in two ways. First, you must help them understand the maxims as they are set forth in the holy gospel. Second, you must guide them in such a manner that they will be led to put these maxims into practice. To appreciate and practise the maxims effectively they need visible angels to inspire them by instruction and good example. This is how these holy maxims will make a strong impression on their minds and hearts.

Such is the role you have to play in relation to your disciples. It is your duty to act towards them as your guardian angels act towards you. You must win them to practise the maxims of the gospel and to this end you must give them means which are easy and accommodated to their age. Gradually accustomed to this practice in their childhood, they will be able, when older, to have a kind of habit of practising these maxims without great difficulty.

You encounter so many obstacles to salvation in this life that, if you are left to yourself and your own resources, it is impossible to escape unharmed. This is why God has given you guardian angels to watch over you and prevent you from falling against some stone, as the prophet says, that is, some obstacle to your salvation. Your angels inspire you and help you to keep clear of whatever obstacles you might encounter.

It is much easier for children to fall over some precipice, because they are weak in mind as well as body, and have little understanding of what is for their own good. They need the light of watchful guides to lead them on the path of salvation, guides who have an adequate understanding of what God expects of young people, and their usual shortcomings. Thus they will be able to help children be aware of pitfalls and keep away from them.

This is why God has provided children with teachers, and why He has given teachers all the care and vigilance, as well as the responsibility, needed to prevent anything harmful to salvation from capturing the hearts of children. More than that, teachers are responsible for guiding children so well through all the dangers they meet in the world, that thanks to such attentive guidance and to the protection of God, the devil doesn't even dare approach them.

Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over the children confided to you, that you will take every possible care to shield them from serious faults. Ask Him to be such good guides through the light your prayers will obtain for you from God and the fidelity you bring to your work, that you will see clearly every obstacle to the good of children and keep away every harm that could injure their souls on the path of salvation.

This is the main concern you must have for the children entrusted to you. It is the main reason why God has entrusted you with so holy a ministry, and He will call upon you to give an exact account on the day of judgment.

SIXTH MEDITATION

How the Function of Guardian Angel Is Fulfilled in the Education of Youth

(1)

BECAUSE GUARDIAN ANGELS are very enlightened and know the true good as it really is, God makes known this true good and the secret of His holy will through them. By the light they communicate these angels teach the good to be practised by those whom God has predestined through Jesus Christ to be His adopted sons, whom He has chosen to be His heirs.

This was symbolized by the ladder which Jacob saw in a dream when he was traveling in Mesopotamia. Angels were going up and coming down the ladder. They were going up to God to make known the needs of those entrusted to them, and to receive orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding the will of God concerning their salvation.

You must do the same thing for the children entrusted to your care. It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from Him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them—as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel.

You must, therefore, not only know these truths in a general way, but also have such a grasp on all of them that you are able to make your disciples understand them clearly and in detail.

Have you studied well all these truths up to the present, and are you thoroughly committed to their making a strong impression on the minds of these children? Have you regarded this responsibility as the most important in your work? From this moment take the steps to make it your main concern to teach perfectly the truths of the faith and the practical maxims of the holy gospel to those who are entrusted to you.

(2)

Guardian angels are not satisfied with enlightening the minds of those under their guidance with the light needed to know God's will and to achieve salvation. They also inspire their charges and provide them with the means to do the good that is proper to them.

God uses the angels not only to deliver those entrusted to them from the powers of darkness and make them grow in the knowledge of Himself but also to help them lead a life worthy of Him, so that they will be pleasing to Him in every way and multiply good works of every sort. The angels are zealous for the good of those in their care because of the commission they have received from God, the Father of light and of all good. They contribute, as far as they are able, to make those in their care worthy of sharing the lot of the saints.

As men chosen by God to announce the truths of the gospel, you share in the ministry of the guardian angels by making known these truths to children. You must teach them how to put these truths into practice and you must have a great zeal that these children maintain this practice throughout their lives. You must, in imitation of the great Apostle, encourage them to make their lives worthy of God, since God has called them to His kingdom and His glory. Your zeal must go so far in this that you are ready to give your very life, so dear to you are the children entrusted to you.

It is your duty, then, to admonish the unruly in a way that will lead them to give up their former way of life. You must cheer the faint-hearted, support the weak, and be patient toward all. Your purpose is to be in a position to stop and curb their bad inclinations and to establish them so firmly in the practice of good that they will give the devil no chance to work on them.

Is this the way you have been guiding your disciples? Have you been helping them practise the good that is appropriate to their years? Have you shown concern that they learn reverence, especially at prayer and in church, and that they receive the sacraments frequently? You must watch over them with great care to help them practise good and have a hatred for sin. These are two very useful ways to lead them to achieve their salvation.

(3)

If you want to fulfill your ministry as guardian angels for the children whom you teach, making them holy and perfect, and building up by them the body of Christ, you must work to inspire them with the same sentiments and to put them in the same dispositions which St. Paul tried to achieve in the Ephesians through the letter he wrote to them. First, your desire must be that they not sadden the Holy Spirit of God, with whom they have been sealed by baptism and confirmation against the day of redemption. Second, you would be deserving of blame if you did not encourage them to lay aside their former way of life; you must, therefore, lead them with zeal to put an end to lying and to speak the truth to their neighbor at all times. Third, you must help them to be kind to one another, compassionate, mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven them in Jesus Christ, and loving one another even as Jesus Christ has loved them.

Is this the way you have taught your disciples up to the present? Are these the maxims with which you have inspired them? Have you had enough vigilance over them and has

your zeal been ardent enough to bring them to practise these maxims? Bring all your efforts to be faithful in this for the future.

The Task of Teaching Youth Is One
of the Most Necessary
in the Church

(1)

God chose and destined St. Paul, as he himself says, to preach the gospel to the nations, and God gave him such a knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, that he was established, as a good master-builder, to lay the foundation for the building of faith and religion which God erected in the cities where St. Paul announced the gospel. St. Paul was, according to the grace which God had given him, the first to preach in these places, so that he says quite justly that those to whom he announced the gospel are his work and that he has begotten them in Jesus Christ.

Without comparing yourself to this great saint (and keeping in mind the due proportion between your work and his), you can say that you are doing the same thing he did, that you are fulfilling the same ministry in your profession. You must, then, look upon this work entrusted to you by pastors, by fathers and mothers, as one of the most important and most necessary services in the church. For you lay the foundation for the building of the church when you instruct children in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ when he was on earth. St. Paul says that without faith it is impossible to please God and consequently be saved and enter the homeland of heaven, for faith is the confident assurance of the hope that we have. The knowledge, then, that each must have of the faith, the instruction that must be given concerning the faith to those who are ignorant of it, is one of the most important things in our religion. How much, then, you

must consider yourselves honored by the church, to be chosen by her for such a holy and exalted work, to procure for children the knowledge of our religion and the Christian spirit.

Pray God that He will make you fit to fulfill such a ministry in a manner worthy of Him.

(2)

The importance of this ministry is seen in the fact that the holy bishops of the early church looked upon it as their main duty and even considered it an honor to instruct the catechumens and new Christians, and teach catechism to them. St. Cyril, patriarch of Jerusalem, and St. Augustine have left us catechisms which they wrote and taught themselves, and which they also caused to be taught by the priests who helped in their pastoral duties. St. Jerome, whose knowledge was so profound, testifies in his letter to Leta that he considered it a greater honor to teach catechism to a young child than be a tutor to a mighty ruler. Gerson, the famous chancellor of the University of Paris, regarded this ministry so highly that he practised it himself.

These great saints acted this way because teaching was the first ministry Jesus Christ gave his holy apostles, a fact St. Luke reports when he says that as soon as Jesus had chosen his apostles, he sent them forth to proclaim the reign of God. This is also what Jesus Christ requested of his apostles very clearly just before he departed from them, telling them, "go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This is likewise the first thing St. Peter did in the temple of Jerusalem after the descent of the Holy Spirit, with the immediate result that three thousand people began to live their faith in Jesus Christ.

Similarly this was the special ministry of St. Paul, as is evident in his discourses in the Areopagus and those before Felix and Festus as reported in the Acts of the Apostles.

St. Paul testifies to the Corinthians that it would even be painful to him, if he had to come to them without being useful by teaching and catechizing them.

But Jesus Christ did not limit himself to charging his apostles with the work of teaching catechism. He did this work himself and taught the principal truths of our religion, as reported in several places in his gospel. He told his apostles, "I must announce the good news of the reign of God, because this is why I have been sent."

Say the same thing, that this is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the church, whose ministers you are, commissions you. Bring all the care needed, then, to fulfill this ministry with the zeal and success of the saints.

(3)

There is no need to be surprised that the first bishops of the early church and the holy apostles had such an esteem for the ministry of teaching the catechumens and the first Christians, or that St. Paul especially took pride in being sent to preach the gospel.

St. Paul makes it clear, however, that he did not preach with clever words, lest the cross of Jesus Christ become void of its meaning, since God has turned the wisdom of this world into folly. Enlightened by God's wisdom and light, St. Paul says that the world did not come to know God through its own wisdom, but it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel.

The reason that St. Paul gives why this ministry was so esteemed is that God's secret plan was unveiled to him, and he had received the grace of unveiling to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, so that those, who in former times had no part in Jesus Christ and were excluded from the covenant of God without His hope and promises, now belong to Jesus Christ and are strangers no longer but fellow citizens of the saints and members of God's household;

they form a building which Jesus Christ has built and raised on the foundation of the apostles; they become the temple where God dwells through His Holy Spirit.

Such is the result accomplished in the church by the great bishops and pastors who followed the example of the holy apostles and devoted themselves to teach others desirous of becoming Christians. This is why they had such a high regard for this ministry. This is also why you must have an altogether special esteem for the Christian education and teaching of children, since it is the means of helping them become true children of God and citizens of heaven. Such teaching is the very foundation and support of their religion and of all the other good that takes place in the church.

Thank God for the grace He has given you in your work, of sharing in the ministry of the holy apostles and of the great bishops and pastors of the church. Take pride in your ministry by making yourselves, as St. Paul says, qualified ministers of the new covenant.

How to Make Your Ministry Useful to the Church

(1)

CONSIDER that you are working in your ministry for the building of the church through your teaching of the children whom God has entrusted to your care. These children are becoming a part of the structure whose foundation was laid by the holy apostles. For this reason you must fulfill your ministry as the apostles fulfilled theirs. As told in the Acts of the Apostles, day after day, both in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. It followed that day by day the Lord increased the number of faithful and the spirit of union among those who were being saved.

The zeal of the holy apostles in announcing the doctrine of Jesus Christ caused the number of disciples to increase. Fearing they would be kept from preaching the word of God by other work, the apostles chose seven deacons to care for the alms and other needs of the faithful.

If the holy apostles acted this way it was because Jesus Christ had given them the example, for it is said of him that he was teaching in the temple area from day to day and the entire populace was listening to him and hanging on his words, whereas at night he would leave the city to pray on the Mount of Olives.

You are successors to the apostles in their task of catechizing and teaching the poor. If you want to make your ministry as useful to the church as it can be, you must teach catechism every day, helping your disciples learn the basic truths of our religion. In this way you will be following the example of the apostles and of Jesus Christ himself, who devoted himself daily to this ministry. Like them, also, you

must afterwards leave your work and devote yourself to reading and mental prayer, in order to learn at their source the truths and the holy maxims which you wish to teach, and draw upon yourself the grace of God that you need to fulfill this ministry according to the spirit and the intention of the church, which entrusts it to you.

(2)

It would have been of little value for the holy apostles to teach the first Christians the essential truths of our religion, if they did not lead them to the Christian way of life which they themselves had lived with Jesus Christ. The apostles were not satisfied with teaching doctrine, but they had a wonderful care to bring the first Christians to practise their religion. God blessed their care so well that, it is said, those who first received the faith persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in communal life, in the breaking of bread, in prayer, and in going to the temple area every day united in the same spirit. In other words, once they were baptized they continued to live in harmony with the doctrine of the apostles.

Following St. Paul's conversion he did the same, for it is said of him that after teaching the people of Ephesus for three months in the Jewish synagogue, he then taught every day in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, and continued this for two years, with the result that the disciples of that city were baptized in the name of Lord and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

The chief care, then, of the apostles, after teaching the first faithful, was to have them receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit.

Above everything else, this is what you are obliged to do in your ministry. In imitation of the apostles you must give a very special care that those whom you teach receive

the sacraments, that they are made ready to receive confirmation with the proper dispositions in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the graces which this sacrament produces. You must watch that they go to confession often after learning how to do this well. You must dispose them to receive their first communion with holy dispositions and to go to communion frequently thereafter in order to preserve the grace they received the first time they performed this action. Oh, if you knew the great good that you procure for them in preserving and increasing grace by their frequent reception of the sacraments, you would never let up teaching them about this!

(3)

St. James says, "What good is it to profess faith without practising it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it?" What good is it, then, to teach your disciples the truths of the faith if you do not teach them to practise it? For faith without works is dead. It will not, then, be enough to have taught your disciples the mysteries and the truths of our religion, if you have not helped them learn the chief Christian virtues, and if you have not taken a very special care to help them put these virtues into practice, as well as all the good of which they are capable at their age. For no matter how much faith they may have, nor how lively it may be, if they are not practising any good works at all, their faith will be of no use to them.

You must especially teach this maxim to those whom you instruct if you want to put them on the road to heaven. You must be able to say to them, "You have acted in a way that is beyond reproach and it is this that has given consolation to us."

Inspire them also with reverence and self-control in church and in the practices of religion you have them perform in the schools. Instill in them the innocence and humility that our Lord recommends so strongly in the gospel. Do not

forget to help them develop gentleness, patience, love, and respect for their parents and all the conduct that is proper to a Christian child, in a word, all that our religion demands of them.

NINTH MEDITATION

The Obligation of Those Who Teach Youth to Have Great Zeal to Fulfill Well So Holy a Ministry

(1)

REFLECT on what St. Paul says, that God has established in the church apostles, prophets, and teachers, and you will be convinced that He has also established you in your ministry. The same saint gives you another expression of this when he says that there are different gifts, different ministries, and that to each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good, that is, the good of the church. To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the gift of faith is given by the same Spirit.

You must not doubt that it is a great gift of God, this grace He has given you to be entrusted with the instruction of children, to announce the gospel to them and to bring them up in the spirit of religion. But in calling you to this holy ministry, God demands that you fulfill it with an ardent zeal for their salvation. For this is the work of God and whoever does God's work carelessly is cursed.

Let it be clear, then, in all your relations with the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourself as ministers of God, acting with love, with a sincere and true zeal, accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer, willing to be dishonored by men and mistreated, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry.

The zeal that inspires you is meant to give you these dispositions, recognizing that it is God Who has called you, Who has chosen you for this ministry, and Who has sent you

to work in His vineyard. Fulfill your ministry, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for Him.

(2)

What ought to encourage you to have much zeal in your vocation is the fact that you are not only the ministers of God, but also of Jesus Christ and of the church. This is what St. Paul says when he expresses the wish that men should regard those who announce the gospel as ministers of Jesus Christ, whose role is to write the letter dictated by Christ, not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh which are the hearts of children.

For this reason, and in this spirit, you must have the love and the glory of God as your single aim in teaching these children, since the love of God impels you, because Jesus Christ died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who died for them.

This is what your zeal must inspire in your disciples, God as it were appealing through you, since you are ambassadors for Christ.

You must also show the church what love you have for her and give her proof of your zeal, since it is for the church (which is the body of Christ) that you work. You have become her ministers through the commission God gave you to preach His word to these children.

Since the church has a great zeal for the sanctification of her children, it is your duty to share in her zeal, so that you can say to God as the holy King David, "The zeal of your house consumes me." This house is none other than the church, since the faithful form this building on the foundation of the apostles, a building raised up by Jesus Christ who is the capstone.

Let your zeal give tangible proof that you love those whom God has entrusted to you just as Jesus Christ has loved his church. Help them enter truly into the structure of this

building and be able one day to come before Jesus Christ full of glory, without stain, or wrinkle, or blemish. In this way God will be able to display to the ages that are to come the great wealth of His favor to them, which He accomplished by procuring them the help of education. It is for you to give them this education and training, so that they may become heirs of the kingdom of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord.

(3)

Since your ministry has for its purpose to procure the salvation of souls, the first concern you must have is to procure this goal as far as you are able. You must imitate God Himself to some extent, for He so loved the souls He created that when He saw them involved in sin and unable to free themselves, His zeal and desire for their salvation led Him to send His own Son to rescue them from their miserable condition.

This is what made Jesus Christ say that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life.

See what God and Jesus Christ have done to restore souls to the grace they had lost. What must you not do for them in your ministry if you have a zeal for their salvation. How much you must possess the dispositions St. Paul had towards those to whom he preached the gospel, when he wrote that he was not seeking anything they had, but only themselves.

The zeal you are obliged to have in your ministry must be so active and so alive that you are able to tell the parents of the children entrusted to your care what is said in scripture: "Give us their souls, keep everything else for yourselves," that is, what we want is to work for the salvation of their souls; this is the only reason we have undertaken the responsibility to guide and teach them.

Tell the parents, too, what Jesus Christ said about the flock which he shepherds and saves: "I came that they might

have life and have it to the full.” For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next.

TENTH MEDITATION

How a Brother of the Christian Schools Must Show Zeal in His Ministry

(1)

CONSIDER that the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into this world was to destroy sin. This must also be the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools and therefore the first object of your zeal. It must lead you to oppose anything displeasing to God in the children under your guidance. If you observe in them something that offends God, you must immediately do all that you are able to remedy the problem.

You must show your zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of your disciples in the manner of the prophet Elias: "I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of Hosts," he says, "because the children of Israel have forsaken the covenant which they had made with God." If you have zeal for the children in your care, and if you want to keep them from sin as you must, take on this spirit of the prophet Elias when they fall into some fault. With the same zeal that inspired this prophet you must say to your disciples: "I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you forsake the covenant you made with Him in baptism, the identity of children of God which you received in that sacrament."

Often encourage your disciples to avoid sins with as much speed as they would the presence of a snake. Let your first attention be given especially to inspire them with a disgust for impurity, negligence in church and at prayer, stealing, lying, disobedience, lack of respect for their parents and for other faults against their companions. Help them understand that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

You must not be satisfied with keeping the children in your care from doing evil. You must also lead them to practise well all the good of which they are capable. Take care of this, then, and see to it that they always speak the truth and that when they want to affirm something they limit themselves to saying that it is or is not so. Help them understand that they will be believed more readily when they use few words than when they swear great oaths, because people will consider that it is in a Christian spirit that they do not use more words.

Help them put into practice what our Lord says when he commands us to love our enemies, to do good to those who persecute us and speak unjustly against us. Help them avoid completely any rendering evil for evil, injury for injury, and taking revenge.

You must encourage them, in accord with the teaching of Jesus Christ, not to be satisfied with doing good actions but also avoid doing them for the praise or honor the actions may bring them, because those who act this way have already received their reward.

It is important that you teach them to pray to God, as our Lord taught those who followed him, with much reverence and in secret, that is, with much recollection, getting rid of all thoughts that could distract their minds during the time of prayer, so that they will be occupied solely with God and easily obtain what they ask of Him.

Since the majority of your disciples are poor, you must encourage them not to set their hearts on riches, but to have a love for poverty, because our Lord was born poor and loved the poor; he was glad to be with them and even said that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of heaven belonged to them.

These are the kinds of maxims and practices you must continually inspire in your disciples if you have any zeal for their salvation. It will be especially in this way that you will show your zeal for the glory of God, because these

maxims can come only from God, being contrary to human inclination, and it is characteristic of zeal for the honor and glory of God that it inspires children to put these maxims into practice.

(3)

Your zeal towards the children you teach would not go very far and would not have much result or success if it limited itself only to words. To be effective, your teaching must be supported by your example. This must be one of the chief characteristics of your zeal.

St. Paul, speaking to the Philippians, after teaching them different maxims, adds, "Act according to these maxims and be imitators of me, taking as your guide those who follow the example that I have given; live according to what I have taught you, what you have heard me say, what I have written, what you have seen me do." It was part of the ardent zeal of this great saint for the salvation of souls to have them observe what he practised himself.

This is also the way that Our Lord acted, of whom it is said that he began to do and then to teach, and speaking to his apostles after he had washed their feet, he says, "What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do."

It is easy to conclude from these examples that your zeal for the children under your guidance would be very imperfect, if you expressed it only in teaching them; it will only become perfect if you practise yourself what you are teaching them. Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words. This is especially true of children, since they do not yet have sufficient capacity for reflection, and ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than to carry out what they hear told to them, particularly when the words they hear are not in harmony with the actions they see.

The Obligation of the Brothers
of the Christian Schools to Reprove and
Correct the Faults Committed
by Those Whom They Teach

(1)

ONE of the characteristics and effects of zeal for the well-being and salvation of souls is to reprove and correct those in our care when they fall into some fault.

Jesus Christ often made his zeal for the Jews manifest in this way. He went into the Temple of Jerusalem and drove out those who were buying and selling the things needed for the sacrifices. He even made a whip of cords to chase them. Jesus acted similarly towards the Pharisees because he could not tolerate their hypocrisy, false religion, nor the pride which led them to think highly of their own actions and praise themselves, while belittling and blaming the behavior of others. He condemned them roundly because they satisfied themselves with teaching others but took no pains to practise what they taught. In each of these encounters Jesus Christ rebuked and blamed them publicly, and he did this not only to the Pharisees but also to others on several occasions.

St. Paul with similar freedom reproved the Corinthians for tolerating an incestuous person in their community, telling them that they should have handed him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit might be saved.

You too must reprove and correct your disciples when they commit some fault, the more so because it is typical of children that they often make mistakes by doing many

things without thinking. Reproof and correction cause them to reflect on what they have to do and lead them to watch over themselves in order not to be making the same mistakes all the time.

Be careful, then, not to allow considerable faults in them to go by without remedy.

(2)

Humans are naturally so much inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than committing it. This appears to be particularly true of children, because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to satisfy themselves, their senses, their natural drives.

This is why the Holy Spirit says that folly is close to the hearts of children, and correction is the only way to heal them. The way to free the souls of children from hell, then, is to make use of this remedy which gives them wisdom. If left to their own willfulness, they run the risk of ruining themselves and causing much sorrow to their parents. Faults committed will become habit and very difficult to correct. The good and bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a period of time ordinarily become second nature:

This is why those who guide young children must reprove them, as St. Paul says, with the authority of command. Thus, brought back from wandering and taken captive by God to do His will, they shall escape the devil's trap.

It can be said with real reason that children who have acquired a habit of sin have more or less lost their freedom and have made themselves unfortunate captives. According to what Jesus Christ says, everyone who lives in sin is the slave of sin.

You who are teachers have the responsibility to use every possible means to bring those under your guidance

into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained for us by dying for us. You must do this by possessing two qualities in your relationship with them. The first is gentleness and patience. The second is prudence in your reproofs and corrections.

(3)

You must be inspired the more in your responsibility to reprove and correct the faults of your disciples, because if you fail in this you will be yourselves subject to reproof before God, who will punish you for your weakness and neglect. Since you are substitutes for their fathers and mothers and their pastors, you are obliged to keep watch over these children as men who must render an account for their souls. If you do not watch over their conduct, you had better realize that, since these children are not able to guide themselves, you will render an account to God for the faults they commit just as if you had committed them.

The high priest Eli is a good example, and a frightening one as well, of this truth. Because he allowed bad behavior in his children, God announced to him through Samuel that He was condemning his family once and for all because of this crime: Though he knew that his sons were behaving in an improper manner, he did not correct them. God swore that this crime could not be expiated by sacrifices or offerings to the Lord, so great was the sin considered by God.

You who hold the place of father and pastor of souls must have a fear that God will act the same way towards you, if you neglect to reprove and correct your disciples when it is needed, for you would have abused the ministry with which God honored you when He put you in charge of guiding these children. He has entrusted you especially with the care of their souls, which is what God had most at heart when He made you the guides and guardians of these young children. You must have a fear that your negligence may not be pardoned any more than that of the high priest

Eli, if you are not sufficiently faithful to God in your ministry of striving to preserve in His grace the souls of those entrusted to your guidance.

The Proper Manner for Reproving and Correcting the Faults of Those for Whom We Are Responsible

(1)

IT WOULD BE of little value to issue reproofs and corrections, if those giving them did not take the necessary steps to make them properly. The first thing that must be assured is that they are not undertaken except under the guidance of the Spirit of God. This is why, before undertaking them, it is desirable to become interiorly recollected, to give oneself up to God's Spirit, and to be disposed to make the reproof and correction with the greatest possible wisdom and in a manner best suited to make them useful to the one receiving them. For human beings, and even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons.

They must be reproved and corrected with justice, and they must be helped to recognize the wrong they have done, to understand the correction which their fault deserves, and to agree to it. Also, since they are Christians, they must be disposed to accept the reproof or correction in a way that is pleasing to God, as a remedy for their fault, and as a means of becoming more wise. For this is the result which the Holy Spirit says correction must produce in children.

It is desirable also to consider before God what sort of correction the fault deserves, whether the person at fault is truly determined to receive it with cooperation or whether it is necessary to try to dispose the person to this spirit of acceptance.

There is no need to fear that corrections will have a bad result, if they have been administered with the proper

prudence. On the contrary, teachers who reprove and correct those who commit faults draw upon themselves the praise of men, the blessing of God, and the gratitude of those who have been corrected. For you will do them more good in that way than if you flatter them with beautiful words, which only serve to deceive them and maintain them in their faults and recklessness.

Have you up to the present paid attention to yourself not to correct your disciples except with God in view? Have you not corrected them with exaggerated zeal, and possibly with impatience and anger? Was that to help them change their conduct, or was it not rather to punish them for the annoyance they caused you? Has love guided you in this behavior, or have you not acted rather to vent your bad humor on them? Pay close attention to this in the future, so that you will act in this important matter only with the desire to please God.

(2)

St. Paul warned his disciple Titus to admonish sharply those who live without obedience, lest they destroy their faith. He told Timothy to do the same thing so that others may fear to offend. But he also wrote that they must be kindly toward everyone, patiently and gently correcting those who resist authority, in the hope that God will enable them to repent. It is a fact that this is one of the best ways of winning and touching the hearts of those who have fallen into fault, and of disposing them to change their ways.

The prophet Nathan, when he was sent by God to King David, adopted this gentle approach in order to get David to enter into himself and become aware of the two sins, adultery and murder, which he had committed. The prophet began by telling him a parable about a rich man who had a large flock of sheep but stole the only sheep owned by a poor man. This simple story of terrible injustice told by Nathan aroused the anger of David against the guilty man and made

him say that he was deserving of death and that he would not grant him any pardon. At this Nathan answered him, "You are that very man!" and quickly applied his account to the two crimes that David had committed, representing to him the graces he had received from God and how he had abused them.

This is the sort of method you must use with those you teach when they fall into some fault and you have to correct them.

So, if it happens that your feelings have been aroused, avoid making any correction while you are in this state, because the correction would be very harmful to your disciples as well as yourself. In those situations enter into yourself and allow the time of anger to pass without showing it. Then, when you feel that you are completely free of any uncontrolled emotion, you will be able to give yourself to God's Spirit and make the correction you planned with all the moderation of which you are capable.

Have you acted this way in the past? Pray God never to allow you to be carried away by any outburst of anger when you have to punish any of your disciples.

(3)

The result which the wise reproof of Nathan produced in David ought to make you realize how much good the corrections you give your disciples will accomplish, when they are given with gentleness and love. David became angry at the man described in Nathan's parable and when he realized that he was the one for whom the parable was told, had no other response but the words, "I have sinned," and at once took upon himself a severe penance. When the child born of his adultery died, David bowed down before God and made it clear that he accepted His holy will. That is how the wise and restrained manner of the prophet toward the sinful David softened the king's heart: He acknowledged his two sins, asked God's pardon, and was truly sorry.

The result of wise correction is that those receiving it are disposed to correct their faults, whereas when correction is administered through uncontrolled emotion and without having God in view, it serves only to turn the disciple against his teacher and to arouse in him feelings of revenge and ill will, which sometimes last a long time. Results are generally related and similar to the cause that produces them: If you want your corrections to have the results they ought, administer them in a way that can please God and those who receive them. Take care, above all, that it is love and zeal for the salvation of your pupils that lead you to correct them. Show them so much kindness when you give corrections that, though you may cause them pain, they not only will not be angry at you but will show you gratitude for the good you have done for them, a sincere regret for their faults, and a firm intention not to commit them again.

From this very moment put yourself in the frame of mind to use all the necessary means to carry out this plan of action.

Teachers Must Give an Account to God
on the Way They Have Fulfilled
Their Ministry

(1)

YOU ARE CO-WORKERS with God in His work, says St. Paul, and the souls of the children whom you teach are the field that He cultivates through your labors. Since He is the One Who has given you the ministry you exercise, when all of you appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, each one of you will give an account to God of what you have done as a minister of God and as an administrator of His mysteries for children.

Since Jesus Christ has been appointed by God to be your judge, he will say to you as the rich man said to his manager in the parable of the gospel, "Give me an account of your administration." He will then examine to the very depths of your heart whether you have been faithful managers of the personal property he has entrusted to you and of the talents which he has given you for his service. The good or bad use you have made of these gifts will then become clear, for the Lord who judges you will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the intentions of hearts.

If you want to prevent the account which you must give from becoming heavier with the passage of time, make it everyday to yourself: Examine before God how you are acting in your ministry and whether you are failing in any of your responsibilities. Come to know yourself just as you are. Find fault with yourself accurately, unsparingly, so that when Jesus Christ comes to judge you, you will be able to face his judgment without being afraid. For when he comes

he will find nothing to condemn in you; you will have prevented his judgment not only regarding your own person but also regarding the talents and graces you have received from God to fulfill well the ministry that He Himself has given to you for children. For He has made you the guardians and guides of children who belong to Him, over whom He has acquired the right of father not only by creation but also by holy baptism, whereby they are all consecrated to Him.

(2)

Consider that the account you will have to give to God will not be inconsequential, because it concerns the salvation of the souls of children whom God has entrusted to your care. On the day of judgment you will answer for them as much as you answer for yourself. You must be convinced of this: that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before asking you to give an account of your own. For when He entrusted them to you, He made you responsible to procure their salvation with as much attention as your own, and you have committed yourselves to be entirely dedicated to the salvation of their souls.

This is what St. Paul brings to your attention, when he says that those who have been made leaders of others must render an account for them to God. He does not say that they will render an account of their own souls, but of the souls of those for whom they are responsible, and they must watch over others because they are obliged to render an account to God for them.

The basic reason for this is, that when they carry out well the service of guides and leaders of the souls entrusted to them, they fulfill at the same time their own responsibilities before God. God will grant them the graces needed for their own sanctification, while they are contributing as far as they are able to the salvation of others.

Have you up to the present looked upon the salvation

of your students as the matter for your own salvation during the whole time that they are under your guidance? For example, you have spiritual exercises which are arranged for your own sanctification, but if you have an ardent zeal for the salvation of those whom you are called to teach, you will not fail to perform them and to relate them to this purpose. In doing this you will draw on your students the graces needed to contribute to their salvation, and you can be assured that if you act this way for their salvation, God Himself will take responsibility for yours. Take on this spirit for the future.

(3)

When Jesus Christ made you responsible for the instruction of children and their formation in religious practice, he entrusted to you the task of building up his body which is the church. You are likewise responsible, as far as you are able, to make her holy, purifying her by the word of life, so that Jesus Christ may present to himself a glorious church, holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle, or anything of that sort. This is why he wants you to give him a faithful account when he calls for it, for he holds this responsibility very much at heart, having loved his church so much that he gave himself up for her.

Since children are the most innocent part of the church, and usually the best disposed to receive the impressions of grace, Jesus Christ desires that you fulfill your task of making them holy, that they all form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature, so that they are no longer like children tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine that originates from human trickery and skill in proposing error. They can be victims of such error in the companions with whom they associate, or in others who propose evil and lead them into falsehood. But you are to help them in all things to grow to the full maturity of Christ, the head, through whom the whole body of the church grows

with the proper functioning of the members joined firmly together by each supporting ligament, building itself up in love. In this they share in the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

Put yourself in the position to be able, when God calls on you, to tell Him that you have acquitted yourself well of all these duties. Be assured that the best way to do this and to be pleasing to Jesus Christ, when he judges you, will be to present him all those children you have taught as part of the structure of the church, built by your care into a temple to become the dwelling place for God in the Spirit.

This is how you will show Jesus Christ that you have truly fulfilled your ministry and that you have worked faithfully to build up and sustain the church, as Jesus Christ has engaged you to do.

Matters of His Ministry on Which a Brother
of the Christian Schools Must Give
an Account to God

(1)

SINCE GOD has called you to your ministry in order to procure His glory and to give children the spirit of wisdom, the insight to know Him clearly, and light for the eyes of their hearts, you will give account of how well you have taught those who have been under your guidance. This is, in fact, a very serious obligation for you and you will be punished for any ignorance in these children concerning their religion (if it is your fault), just as if you yourselves had ignored these truths.

You will give account to God whether you have been careful to teach catechism, and whether you have taught it on all the days and for all the time prescribed for you; whether you have taught all the matters of catechism that your disciples should know according to their age and ability; whether you have not neglected some students because they were the slowest, or the poorest; whether you did not show favoritism towards others because they were rich, or pleasant, or naturally possessing more lovable qualities than others.

You will give account whether you have taught them well how to assist at Holy Mass and to confess their sins properly; whether you have not preferred to teach secular subjects, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, though you must not neglect these, since they are strictly required of you; nevertheless those lessons that contribute to the support of religion are of much greater importance.

You will give account whether during all the time

available for your assignments you have not wasted some on useless activities, or even on useful ones that were not your responsibility; whether you have taken care to keep informed (during the time assigned to you for this) about the things you were obliged to teach those who were placed under your guidance.

Are your accounts in good shape and are you ready to give them? If not, put them in order without delay, and examine yourself seriously in regard to all your responsibilities. If there has been any negligence in your conduct, take a firm resolution to correct yourself. Before God be determined to do better in the future so that death will not surprise you in any regrettable condition.

(2)

When you appear before God it will not be sufficient for you to have taught the children entrusted to you, but you will be found guilty if you have not watched over their conduct. For it is your duty to watch over them carefully, as men who must give an account to God for their souls.

Consider well what it means to give account to God for the salvation of a soul that is damned, because you did not take care to lead it to what is right and assist it in living accordingly.

Are you convinced that you are as obliged to take care of your disciples while they are in church as you are when they are in school, in order to prevent them from doing anything even the least displeasing to God? Is it not also your responsibility to be attentive during the prayers you have them say, in order that they do so with great reverence, wisdom, and the respect appropriate for speaking to God? Do you believe, possibly, that you are responsible for your disciples only during the time of school, that your attention need not extend to their behavior outside of school, to help them as far as you are able to live everywhere in a Christian manner, and to keep them from associating with bad com-

panions during the entire time they are under your guidance? To give account for their souls means to give account for everything that concerns their salvation. To watch carefully means to watch over everything with attention, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing.

If you have not applied yourself to all these duties, consider yourself guilty before God and realize how fearful it will be to appear before Him at the moment of your death after you have lived in such negligence of all that concerns His service.

(3)

What you say and do need not be as great a concern in the account you will have to render to God as the intention and the manner of these actions. For the faults of speaking and acting are usually more tangible and more readily recognized in your examination. About intention St. Paul says that whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, you must do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not in order to please others but to please God. This is the care you must show and the sole motive that God wants you to have in your ministry.

Is it not true that often you have hardly thought of this at all, that usually you have had no intention whatsoever, or if you have had one it was purely natural and human? This single fault, then, would have spoiled all that you did, however good it might have been in itself, and would have blocked God's blessings on your action.

You will give God no less an account concerning the manner of carrying out your ministry, whether you have worked with wisdom and seriousness, without undue familiarity with those whom you teach. This seriousness is what St. Paul recommended so strongly to Titus, his disciple, for a minister of the gospel, and which he believed more than any other quality, necessary for him. After zeal for teaching and good example, this serious self-control is one

of the most useful virtues for those who are responsible for teaching the young.

Nevertheless, do not overlook the account you will have to give of your patience and the control of your feelings. This again is a very important point to which you must be very attentive, especially when the children in your care do something out of order, and you are required to reprove or correct them. There is nothing you must avoid more than allowing your feelings to run away with you in situations like this. This must be one of the main points of your examination regarding the account that God will ask of you concerning your ministry. Consider this very seriously.

The Reward that Those Can Expect Even
in This Life Who Have Taught Children
and Fulfilled This Duty Well

(1)

God is so good that He does not leave unrewarded the good work that is done for Him and the service that is rendered to Him, especially for the salvation of souls. If it is true that God rewards so generously even in this world those who have left all things for Him, that they receive a hundred-fold in this life, with how much more reason will He not reward, even in this present time, those who have devoted themselves with zeal to the spreading of His kingdom!

To reward so great a good work and a service which He regards so highly, God gives two kinds of reward in this world to those who commit themselves unconditionally to the work of saving souls. First, He gives them an abundance of grace; second, He gives them a larger field for their ministry and a greater facility for accomplishing the conversion of souls.

The first of these rewards is set forth in the parable of the man who hands his funds over to his servants and gives one of them five thousand silver pieces to invest. When he learns later that the servant has made another five, in order to reward him he orders that the thousand silver pieces, given to the servant who has not made any profit, be taken away and given to the one who now has ten thousand. "Those who have will get more," the Savior says, "until they grow rich."

St. Luke expresses well the second kind of reward, the larger field of ministry, in the parable of the man of noble birth taking account of the money which he has given his

servants to invest. He rewards the first servant who has earned ten units of money by giving him the government of ten villages.

Oh, how fortunate you ought to consider yourselves, to be working in the field of the Lord, since our Lord says that the reaper will surely receive his reward!

Devote yourselves, then, with zeal and affection to your work, since it will be one of the most helpful means to assure your salvation.

(2)

Another reward even in this life which they receive who work for the salvation of souls, is the consolation they have of seeing God served well by those whom they teach, of knowing that their work has not been useless but helpful for the salvation of those whom they were called upon to teach.

It is in this spirit that St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, to whom he preached the gospel, that he has begotten them in Christ Jesus and that they are his work in the Lord. Similarly he finds joy in their good will and boasts about them because their zeal has stirred up many others. He adds that it is his hope that, as their faith grows, their influence will also grow and extend beyond their borders for the winning of souls through announcing the gospel. Yet he says it is only in our Lord Jesus Christ that he boasts of what he has done for God.

It was the spread of God's glory by the preaching of the gospel that made up all the consolation of this great apostle, and this must be yours as well, to make God and His Son Jesus Christ known to the flock confided to you. Oh, what glory is yours to have this kind of identity with that chosen instrument! With joy, then, say as he does, that the greatest cause of your consolation in this life is to announce the gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear it.

It is indeed a great honor for you to teach your disciples the truths of the gospel solely for the love of God. It was this thought that gave continual consolation to the teacher of nations and filled him with joy that knew no bounds despite his many afflictions.

You, too, must consider it a great reward for yourselves, the consolation you feel at the bottom of your hearts, that the children whom you teach are well-behaved, know their religion well, and show reverence for God. Thank God with all your heart for all these rewards that He gives you in advance in this life.

(3)

You can expect yet another reward which God will give you in advance in this life if you devote yourselves generously to your duty and, if through zeal and the grace of your state, you know how to strengthen your disciples in the Christian spirit. This is the very special satisfaction you will experience when they grow up and you see them living honorably and reverently, far from any unjust association, and performing good deeds.

For the teaching you give them is not a mere matter of words, but accompanied by a great abundance of grace for those who respond well, which will maintain them in the practice of good. Their perseverance in the faith will be a great cause of joy for you when you call to mind the way they show their faith and the results of the lessons you gave them, realizing that this makes them dear to God and places them in the number He has chosen.

What a joy it will be to see that they have received the word of God in your religion lessons not as the word of men but as the word of God powerfully at work within them, which will be apparent in the honorable lives they continue to live. For this reason you can say, in the joy you experience seeing their perseverance in the faith, that they are your

hope, your consolation, and your crown of glory before our Lord Jesus Christ.

Look upon this, then, as a considerable reward which God gives you, even in this world, to see, by means of the establishment of the schools placed by God in your responsibility, that religion and the practice of the faith are increased among the faithful, especially among the working class and the poor. Thank God every day, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He has been pleased to establish this benefit and to give this support to the church. Pray to Him fervently, too, that He will be pleased to make your Institute grow and bear fruit day by day, so that, as St. Paul says, the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and in justice.

The Reward that a Brother of the
Christian Schools Can Expect in Heaven,
if He is Faithful in His Ministry

(1)

ST. PAUL complained because some of the Corinthians said they belonged to Paul while others said they belonged to Apollos. He told them that each of them would receive his wages in proportion to his labor. This should make you realize that your happiness in heaven will be greater than what will be enjoyed by those who have worked only for their own salvation. It will, in fact, be much greater in proportion to the number of children you have taught and won over to God. The work of each one who has labored on the building of the church, says the Apostle, will be made clear on the day of the Lord, because fire will test the quality of each one's work.

In a special way the work of those who have taught children and formed them in the faith will become clearly known, those who have trained their disciples in the Christian spirit, and those who have helped them acquire a solid faith. Such teachers will easily be distinguished from those who have not assisted their disciples to form good habits, who have been careless towards them in these important matters. The one whose building stands, says the Apostle, that is, the one whose disciples have acquired a strong faith through the teacher's concern and efforts, will be rewarded in proportion to the work that has been done.

Consider, then, that your reward in heaven will be as great as the good that you will achieve in the lives of the children who are entrusted to your care. It is in this spirit

that St. Paul told the Corinthians: "You will be our glory in the time to come on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

You can say the same thing of your disciples, namely, that on the day of judgment they will be your glory, if you have taught them well and if they have profited from your teaching, because the lessons you have taught them and the profit they have received will be made clear before the whole world. Not only on that day, but throughout all eternity you will receive the glory of having taught them well, because the glory that you have procured for them will reflect on you.

Fulfill the duties of your ministry so well that you may be able to enjoy this blessing.

(2)

What a consolation for those who have procured the salvation of others, to see in heaven a great number whom they have helped attain so great a happiness! This will happen to those who have taught many the truths of religion, as the prophet Daniel has said: "Those who instruct many in Christian justice will shine like stars for all eternity." They will shine, indeed, in the midst of those they have taught, who will eternally bear witness to the great gratitude they have for the valuable instructions of their teachers, whom they will regard as the cause, after God, of their salvation.

Oh, what joy a Brother of the Christian Schools will have when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal happiness, for which they are indebted to him by the grace of Jesus Christ! What a sharing of joy there will be between the teacher and his disciples! What a special reunion among them in the presence of God! It will be one great celebration for them, sharing together the blessings for which the call of God had given them hope, the wealth of the glorious heritage God has given them with all the saints.

To possess such a great happiness at the moment of your

death and be able to see your disciples possess this happiness with you when they come to the end of their lives, carry out your responsibilities from now on with fidelity.

(3)

The holy King David says that his heart will be filled with gladness when God will grant him the grace to see Him and to enjoy the glory of heaven. For the sight of God fills all the powers of a person in such a way that all consciousness of self is lost, so to speak. The person is entirely plunged within the divinity and totally imbued with God Himself. This is the happiness of heaven that will be enjoyed by those who have procured the salvation of others, who have done this in a way that has been useful to the general good of the church, who have by their care restored the robe of innocence to a great number of their disciples that may have lost it through sin, and have helped to preserve the innocence of many others who have never lost it.

This will happen to those who have carried out the role of guardian angels for the children entrusted to them by Providence, who have saved a great number of them by the ardent zeal and the continual fidelity they brought to their ministry. Ah, what a thrill of joy you will get when you hear the voices of those whom you have led almost by the hand into heaven! On the day of judgment, as well as in heaven itself, they will be saying the same thing said by the girl delivered from the devil by St. Paul. Speaking of the Apostle and those who were with him, she proclaimed, "These men are servants of the Most High; they have made known to us the way of salvation." Then they will represent the good you have done among them. Some will represent to Jesus Christ the robe of innocence you helped them keep in all its purity. Others will represent to him the trouble you took to help them wash away their sins in the blood of the Lamb, and to lead them on the path of salvation.

All of them will join in asking Jesus Christ to grant

you a favorable judgment, praying him not to delay putting you in possession of the happiness you procured for them by your work and your concern. Oh, what glory there will be for those who have taught young people, when their zeal and devotion to procure the salvation of children will be made public before the whole world! All heaven will resound with the thanksgiving these blessed children will render to those who taught them the road to heaven.

To gain all these blessings, all these kinds of glory, for yourself, act with goodness and wisdom in the care of those who are entrusted to you.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Foreword from the Original Edition ca 1730

This little book of meditations contains reflections on the main duties of those who are devoted to the Christian education of youth, composed by Monsieur de La Salle and intended to help a person become deeply committed to these important duties during a time of spiritual retreat.

For that purpose the author considered it fitting that the Brothers of the Institute of the Christian Schools make use of these meditations for their mental prayer in the afternoon on the eight days of retreat which they make each year during the time of vacation. He wanted to help them appreciate the greatness of their profession as teachers and the necessity of fulfilling so holy a ministry with great fidelity to all its responsibilities.

He has divided his little work into sixteen meditations, two for each day of the retreat, so that one of the two could take the place of public or private reading and serve as material for a conference or exhortation in the evening.

Care has been taken, before sending these meditations to the press, to have them examined by a person of learning and sound doctrine, who corrected a large number of errors that had slipped in through the carelessness and negligence of those who had copied from the original.

Out of respect for the author it was thought proper to leave the meditations just as they were, though they have been written more in the style of instructions, exhortations and regulations, than meditations. They are without expressions of fervent desire, feelings of tenderness, or resolutions

customary in similar meditations, but this is not surprising; the author has done this intentionally, as in the meditations he wrote for all the Sundays and feasts of the year. His purpose was to instruct and exhort the Brothers rather than teach them how to express their desires, emotions, and intimate conversation with God. He had provided for this training by giving the Brothers a method of making mental prayer, in which he taught them very clearly how to express their desires, feelings, and resolutions with facility and effectiveness. Holy man that he was, he held as a practical truth that the acts of mental prayer that come from a person's own heart are incomparably more important than those that come from the expression of desires or feelings in someone else's meditations, though he was far from disapproving these.

There is a great deal of repetition of the same ideas in several of the meditations, but this ought not to be surprising since it was the usual practice of our Lord himself recorded in several places of the gospel, and also of St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, and of many other saints both of the old and new testaments. Such a method has been inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to impress more deeply on the mind and heart the holy truths being taught.

The simplicity and directness of the style of these meditations might suggest that the art of persuasion, though present, is lacking its full measure, but the use of these meditations has always made it clear how effective they are. After all, throughout the meditations there is that deep faith, which was so characteristic of this holy priest, and that ardent zeal for the instruction of children which was so much a part of his life.

Finally, there is no need to be surprised that this apostolic man has so strongly set forth the dignity and merits of the profession and functions of persons who have dedicated themselves to the Christian instruction of children; nor that he should use for this purpose so many passages of holy scripture to prove what he states, especially from the Epistles of St. Paul, whom he had mastered perfectly and on whose

authority he grounded himself; he knew from long experience, and even more from the enlightenment he gained from God, how valuable and important in the eyes of the divine majesty is the instruction of youth; it was this that led him to inspire the same sentiments in those to whom he spoke. He was also convinced that many people looked upon this ministry as very unimportant, contrary to the practice and thought of Jesus Christ himself as well as many saints and distinguished persons who considered it a very great vocation and worked at it themselves with surprising zeal. St. Jerome and St. Gregory are among this number, and many, many others spoken of in the history of the church. St. Protogenes is an admirable example of this. He was bishop of Edessa, exiled by the Arian Emperor Valens to the city of Antinous in Egypt, a city populated by many who practised idolatry. Here he gave himself to conducting a school with marvelous success, eliminating paganism almost entirely.

St. Cassian did the same thing in the city of Imola in Italy and won the crown of martyrdom when he was given over by a sentence of the judge to the vengeance of the children he taught, some of whom were still pagans. Finally, the admirable example of the great devout Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, is a sufficient proof of this truth. He retired to Lyons and did not think it beneath his dignity to dedicate himself to conduct a school for children and to devote himself to freeing them from evil. He said to those who begged him to use his talents for more brilliant services: "They would possibly be more glorious, but not more useful."

APPENDIX B

Scriptural References
in Each of the Meditations

The number on the left is the number of the meditation in the edition of 1922, which has been used for modern day references to the meditations of the Founder. These references follow the study made by Miguel Campos published in *Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 46, 1974.

193	1:1	1 Tim. 2:4 Rom. 10:17 Rom. 10:14 2 Cor. 2:14 2 Cor. 4:6 2 Cor. 4:1-2 1 Cor. 4:1	195	3:1	2 Cor. 5:18 Col. 1:24
	1:2	1 Cor. 3:10 Rom. 12:6-8		3:2	2 Cor. 5:20 2 Cor. 3:3 2 Cor. 4:6
	1:3	1 Tim. 2:4 1 Cor. 3:9 Rom. 11:13-14 2 Cor. 5:18-20 1 Cor. 1:17		3:3	John 15:4 John 15:8 John 1:9
			196	4:1	1 Cor. 3:6 1 Cor. 3:9 Luke 15:4-5
194	2:1	1 Cor. 9:18		4:2	John 13:15 1 Cor. 3:9 Matt. 5:3 Matt. 3:11 Matt. 5:10 Matt. 5:12 Matt. 11:29 Matt. 5:20 Matt. 23:25
	2:2	1 Cor. 2:7-8 1 Thess. 5:22 1 Tim. 4:8			
	2:3	Jas. 2:17 1 Cor. 13:2			

		Luke 6:24		7:2	Luke 9:1-2
	4:3	John 10:10			Matt. 28:19
		John 6:64			Acts 2:14-40
		Luke 11:27			Acts 17:22-31
		2 Cor. 3:3			Acts 24:10-27
		1 Cor. 4:7			Acts 25-26
					2 Cor. 12:14-15
197	5:1	1 Cor. 2:14			Luke 4:43
	5:2	James 2:17		7:3	1 Cor. 1:17
	5:3	Ps. 91:12			Eph. 3:2-3
		Rom. 12:6-8			Eph. 3:8
					Eph. 2:12
198	6:1	Eph. 1:9			Eph. 2:19
		Eph. 1:5			Eph. 2:20
		Eph. 1:11			Eph. 2:22
		Genesis 28:12			Rom. 11:13
	6:2	Col. 1:13			2 Cor. 3:6
		Col. 1:10			
		Col. 1:12	200	8:1	Eph. 2:20
		1 Thess. 2:4			Eph. 2:22
		1 Thess. 2:12			Acts 5:42
		1 Thess. 2:8			Acts 2:46
		1 Thess. 5:14			Acts 6:1-4
		Eph. 4:22			Luke 19:47-48
		Eph. 4:27			Luke 21:37
	6:3	Eph. 4:12		8:2	Acts 2:41,45
		Eph. 4:30			Acts 19:8-10
		Eph. 4:22			Acts 19:5-6
		Eph. 4:25		8:3	James 2:14
		Eph. 4:32			James 2:26
		Eph. 5:2			2 Cor. 7:11
					2 Cor. 7:13
199	7:1	Gal. 1:15-16			Matt. 10:16
		1 Cor. 3:9-10			Matt. 11:29
		1 Cor. 9:1			Col. 3:12
		1 Cor. 4:15			1 Tim. 6:11
		Heb. 11:6			Eph. 6:12
		Heb. 11:1			

201	9:1	1 Cor. 12:28 1 Cor. 15:5-9 1 Cor. 3:9 Jer. 48:10 2 Cor. 6:3-9 Matt. 20:3	203	11:1	John 2:17 Luke 19:45 John 2:14 John 2:15 Matt. 6:2-5 Luke 18:9-14 Matt. 23:3 1 Cor. 5:5
	9:2	1 Cor. 4:1 2 Cor. 3:3 2 Cor. 5:14 2 Cor. 5:15 2 Cor. 5:20 Col. 1:24 Col. 1:25 Ps. 68:10 Eph. 2:20 Eph. 5:25 Eph. 2:22 Eph. 5:27 Eph. 2:7 Eph. 5:5		11:2	Prov. 22:15 Titus 2:15 2 Tim. 2:25,26 John 8:34 Gal. 4:31
	9:3	Eph. 5:1-2 John 3:16 2 Cor. 12:14 Gen. 14:21 John 10:10	204	12:1	Prov. 12:1 Prov. 28:23 Titus 1:10 Titus 1:13 1 Tim. 5:20 2 Tim. 2:24-25 2 Sam. 12:1-12 2 Sam. 12:13-22
			205	13:1	1 Cor. 3:9 1 Cor. 4:1 Luke 16:2 1 Cor. 4:5 Heb. 13:17 Eph. 4:11-12 Col. 1:24 Eph. 5:25,27 Eph. 5:26, 27 Eph. 4:12-15 Eph. 4:16 Eph. 2:22
202	10:1	1 Kings 19:14 Gal. 5:21			
	10:2	Matt. 5:37 Matt. 5:44 Matt. 5:38 Matt. 6:1,5 Matt. 6:6 Matt. 5:3		13:2 13:3	
	10:3	Phil. 3:16-17 Phil. 4:9 Acts 1:1 John 13:15			

206	14:1	Eph. 1:17-18	15:3	1 Thess. 1:2-5
	14:2	Heb. 13:17		1 Thess. 2:13
	14:3	Col. 3:17		1 Thess. 2:19
		1 Thess. 2:4		1 Thess. 1:2
		Titus 2:7		1 Thess. 3:13
		2 Tim. 2:24-25		
			208	
207	15:1	Matt. 19:27-29	16:1	1 Cor. 3:4
		Matt. 25:14-30		1 Cor. 3:8
		Luke 19:12-27		1 Cor. 3:13-14
		John 4:36		2 Cor. 1:14
	15:2	1 Cor. 4:15	16:2	Eph. 1:18
		1 Cor. 9:1	16:3	Ps. 16:11
		2 Cor. 9:2		Acts 16:17
		2 Cor. 10:15-17		Apoc. 7:13-14
		1 Cor. 9:18		
		2 Cor. 7:4		

Principles and Practices in This Translation

An attempt has been made in this translation to be as faithful as possible to the thought, the vocabulary, and the style of St. de La Salle.

An attempt has been made at the same time to write in a contemporary idiom, when this does not lose some of the spirit and style of the original. This has been done more in the sentence and paragraph structure than in vocabulary or phraseology. Long sentences in the original that have a variety of subordinate clauses have been broken down into shorter sentences. More paragraphing has been introduced.

It is hoped that the simplicity, even the austerity, of the Founder's style has been preserved, since this has been pointed out as characteristic of these meditations.

An attempt has been made to cite Scripture in the same manner as the Founder, most often incorporating phrases and thoughts into his own sentence structure without quotation marks, just as he did. Because of the free manner in which the Founder alludes to Scripture, or modifies the literal text, no attempt has been made to adhere consistently to one translation of the Bible. However, the *New American Bible* has been favored whenever this is in harmony with the Founder's nuance of thought.

Certain words or expressions call for particular explanation. One of the most important areas in this regard has to do with the terms used by St. de La Salle when he refers to the actual *work* of the Brothers. Three terms are used most often in the original: *emploi*, *ministère*, and

fonction. The word *emploi* occurs most often, actually thirty-four times in direct reference to the Brothers, three additional times in reference to the work of the apostles, of St. Paul, and of bishops or pastors. The word *ministère* occurs twenty-three times in direct reference to the Brothers, three additional times in reference to the work of the apostles, or the ministry of persons in the service of God or of the church. The word *fonction* occurs nine times in reference to the work of the Brothers, nine other times in reference to the work of Jesus Christ, the apostles, angels, pastors, guides in general, and the operation of the human senses.

A closer study of the shades of meaning these three words have in the Founder's thought may be needed. For the purposes of this translation, however, no attempt has been made to translate these words the same way every time. The three words are taken as fairly equivalent, with the word *ministry* carrying the most significant English meaning for all of them throughout the meditations. An example of one sentence of the original in which all three words occur may illustrate this point: ". . . keeping in mind the due proportion between your work [*emploi*] and his [St. Paul's], you can say that you are doing the same thing, that you are fulfilling the same ministry [*ministère*] in your profession [*profession*]. You must, then, look upon this work [*emploi*] as one of the most important and most necessary services [*fonctions*] in the church" (7:1).

This happens to be the only instance in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* where the Founder refers to the Brothers' work as a "profession." The word is used one other time to refer to a secular occupation.

The Founder uses the word *état* only twice in reference to the Brothers' vocation. The word *service* is never used in reference to the Brothers' work with their students directly as we use it today. The word *service* occurs four times in the original meditations and each time it is in reference to service of God or of Jesus Christ. In this translation the word *service* is used occasionally for *emploi*, or *fonction*.

The words *ouvrage* and *travail* are used only three times

each in these meditations for the work of the Brothers. Both words are used six other times to refer to the work of God Himself, of St. Paul, or of persons generally on behalf of God, or in the case of *travail* for secular work. In this translation the word *work* is used occasionally for *emploi*, or *fonction*.

Another expression that calls for explanation is the term “Christian spirit.” The Founder uses the term *esprit chrétien* only twice, preferring the expression *esprit du christianisme*, which he uses eight times. In all cases, except once, this has been translated “Christian spirit” because it is more accurate to the thought of the seventeenth century as well as today. The one exception is in the Fifth Meditation, second point, where it has been translated “Christian mentality” because the Founder in this meditation seems to have been preoccupied with the *minds* of children; in this particular sentence he seems to differentiate between the *knowledge* of Christian truths and the full Christian spirit which includes the *practice* of good that should flow from this knowledge.

One of the Founder’s words that sounds a little strange today is the word *disciples* in referring to the Brothers’ students. This is his preferred expression throughout the meditations, occurring twenty-seven times, whereas the word *élèves* occurs only five times. The Founder’s preference is maintained in this translation because it conveys an important thought of his meditations. He wants to establish a parallel in the mind of the Brother: as Christ is to his disciples, so the Brother is to his students.

The Founder uses the word *piété* seventeen times in the sixteen meditations. Often it has a scriptural sense of man’s total response to God. At other times it refers to exercises of prayer and devotion. Because the word *piety* is not commonly used today, nor often with a very positive connotation, it has not been used at all in this translation. Sometimes the French word has been translated by the English word *reverence*. At other times it has been translated as *religion*, or *faith*, as when the Founder speaks of helping students “persevere in piety” throughout their lives.

An effort has been made in the translation to render the Founder's use of "man" or "men" (as general terms referring to the human race) in such a way as will reflect this general thought, including women as well as men. This may not have come off as gracefully as desirable, since we are just beginning to make this linguistic effort to speak such eschatological language!

Twice in the meditations the Founder uses the word *human* in what can be considered a pejorative sense. In both instances he is referring to the motives of an action (4:3; 14:3). He is urging the Brothers not to have human attitudes, human motives in their work, because these motives would spoil ("corrupt") otherwise good actions. In two other places he speaks of human nature in a similar pejorative sense (2:3; 6:2). In both instances he is referring to students and sees their nature, or natural inclinations as "corrupt."

Considering the dominant spirituality of the seventeenth century, it can be said that St. de La Salle is very restrained in using such language. There is, in fact, a demonstrative optimism in his treatment of human nature when he writes about it in the preface of his *Method of Mental Prayer*. More significantly, it must be recognized, as Brother Miguel Campos points out in the Introduction, that the Founder's thought in these meditations is focused on the life of God to which all persons are called through Jesus Christ and for which all are empowered by His Spirit. It is not so much that St. de La Salle denigrates human nature. He is rather reflecting the spirit of the gospel, of the life of the new covenant in which we are called to put off the old man and put on the new.

In this translation the word *human* has been rendered literally, but derivatives of *corrupt* have been variously translated: *selfishness* (2:3), *spoiling* (4:3), *bad* (6:2), and *spoiled* (14:3).

The word *establish* is one of those expressions that reflect the Founder's sense of God's action in the history of salvation, in his own life, and in the lives of the Brothers. The word is used in the Ninth Meditation to refer to the action of God

in raising up apostles for the church, and the same word is used to refer to God's call to each Brother individually and to all of the Brothers collectively for the "establishment" of the Christian Schools. Because of this special meaning, the word is rendered literally in the translation, despite the fact that it may have fallen on hard times in recent years.

The word *procure* is another favorite word of the Founder in the meditations. It occurs in one form or another twenty-nine times. This fact has significance in the analysis of Brother Miguel Campos because it recalls the same word in the Brothers' formula of vows, "to procure Your glory." This glory is not separable from the salvation of the Brothers' students and their own. For this reason the Founder uses it to express the Brothers' action in seeking this goal. An attempt has been made in this translation to render the word literally as often as it can be done smoothly, in order to reflect this united goal of the Brothers' lives in the Founder's mind, even though other words might sound more contemporary.

In the Second Meditation, part 3, and in a few other places, the Founder distinguishes between *les vérités pratiques* and *les vérités de pure spéculation*. The former seem to refer to matters of faith as a way of life and daily action; the latter seem to refer to matters of faith as an object of contemplation and theological study. In this translation the latter expression has been translated "truths that are purely doctrinal."

The French text used in this translation is the one published in *Cahiers lasalliens*, vol. 1, 1959. The study made concerning the frequency of word usage has been based on the concordance published in *Lasallianum*, vol. 4, 1956. Both of these valuable resources are part of the immense and scholarly research accomplished by Brother Michel Sauvage during the past twenty years.

Considerable help and valuable advice for this translation have come from several persons, notably Brother Colman Coogan, Brother William Spellman, Brother Thomas Gavin, Brother Martin Helldorfer, and Brother Miguel

Campos. Much of whatever is successful in the translation is owed to them, but none of the shortcomings. Mrs. Diana Weinlein has assisted with great patience and skill in preparing the manuscript.

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